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SELECTED PREJUDICES

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the end of this volume

SELECTED PREJUDICES

SECOND SERIES

by

H. L. MENCKEN



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NOTE

THESE essays, with one exception, are reprinted from five volumes of my *Prejudices*, a series which began in the United States in 1919 and is still going on. All five volumes have been published by Mr. Cape in England. Some of the essays in them, dealing with purely American themes and written in the American form of English, have presented certain difficulties to British readers. In 1926 the experiment was tried of selecting the least American of them, translating them into Standard English, and issuing them under the title of *Selected Prejudices*. The resultant volume, on its appearance in the 'Travellers' Library, met with a very gratifying reception, and so a second one on the same plan is now offered. I have revised its contents carefully, expunging all the more occult Americanisms and adding explanations when necessary. But the changes are really not numerous, and most of them are slight.

H. L. MENCKEN

BALTIMORE, IN THE
MARYLAND FREE STATE,
1927.

SELECTED PREJUDICES

CHAPTER I
ON BEING AN AMERICAN

§ I

APPARENTLY there are those who begin to find it disagreeable – nay, impossible. Their anguish fills the organs of Liberal American opinion, and every ship that puts out from New York carries a groaning cargo of them, bound for Paris, London, Munich, Rome, or Havana – anywhere to escape the great curses and atrocities that make life intolerable for them at home. Let me say at once that, as a native of that great free land, I find little to cavil at in their basic complaints. In more than one direction, indeed, I probably go a great deal farther than even the Young Intellectuals. It is, for example, one of my firmest and most sacred beliefs, reached after an inquiry extending over a score of years and supported by incessant prayer and meditation, that the Government of the United States, in both its legislative arm and its executive arm, is ignorant, incompetent, corrupt, and disgusting – and from this judgment I except no more than twenty living lawmakers and no more than twenty executioners of their laws. It is a belief no less piously cherished that the administration of justice in the Republic is stupid, dishonest, and against all reason and equity – and from this judgment I except no more than thirty judges, including two of the nine upon the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States. It is another that the foreign policy of the United States – its habitual manner of dealing with other nations, whether friend or foe – is hypocritical, disingenuous, knavish, and dis-

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honourable – and from this judgment I consent to no exceptions whatever, either recent or long past. And it is my fourth (and, to avoid too depressing a bill, final) conviction that the American people, taking one with another, constitute the most timorous, snivelling, poltroonish, ignominious mob of serfs and goose-steppers ever gathered under one flag in Christendom since the end of the Middle Ages, and that they grow more timorous, more snivelling, more poltroonish, more ignominious every day.

So far I go with the fugitive Young Intellectuals – and into the Bad Lands beyond. Such, in brief, are the cardinal articles of my political faith, held passionately since my nonage and now growing stronger and stronger as I gradually disintegrate into my component carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, phosphorus, calcium, sodium, nitrogen, and iron. This is what I believe and preach, *in nomine Domini*, Amen. Yet, save for occasional holiday voyages, I remain on the dock, wrapped in the flag when the Young Intellectuals set sail. Yet there I stand, unshaken and undespairing, a loyal and devoted Americano, even a chauvinist, paying taxes without complaint, obeying all laws that are physiologically obeyable, accepting all the searching duties and responsibilities of citizenship unprotestingly, investing the sparse usufructs of my miserable toil in the obligations of the nation, avoiding all commerce with men sworn to overthrow the Government, contributing my mite toward the glory of the national arts and sciences, enriching and embellishing the native language, spurning all lures (and even invitations)

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to get out and stay out — there am I, a bachelor of easy means, forty-seven years old, unhampered by debts or issue, able to go wherever I please and to stay as long as I please — there am I, contentedly and even smugly basking beneath the Stars and Stripes, a better citizen, I dare say, and certainly a less murmurous and exigent one, than thousands who put the Hon. Calvin Coolidge beside Friedrich Barbarossa and Charlemagne, and hold the Supreme Court to be directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and belong ardently to every Rotary Club, Ku Klux Klan, and Anti-Saloon League, and choke with emotion when the band plays ‘The Star-Spangled Banner,’ and believe with the faith of little children that one of Our Boys, taken at random, could dispose in a fair fight of ten Englishmen, twenty Germans, thirty Frogs, forty Wops, fifty Japs, or a hundred Bolsheviki.

Well, then, why do I remain? Why am I so complacent (perhaps even to the point of offensiveness), so free from bile, so little fretting and indignant, so curiously happy? Why did I answer only with a few academic ‘Hear, Hears’ when Henry James, Ezra Pound, and the other *émigrés* issued their successive calls to the native *intelligentsia* to flee the shambles, escape to fairer lands, throw off the curse for ever? The answer, of course, is to be sought in the nature of happiness, which tempts to metaphysics. But let me keep upon the ground. To me, at least (and I can only follow my own nose) happiness presents itself in an aspect that is tripartite. To be happy (reducing the thing to its elementals) I must be:

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- (a) Well-fed, unhounded by sordid cares, at ease in Zion.
- (b) Full of a comfortable feeling of superiority to the masses of my fellow-men.
- (c) Delicately and unceasingly amused according to my taste.

It is my contention that, if this definition be accepted, there is no country on the face of the earth wherein a man roughly constituted as I am – a man of my general weaknesses, vanities, appetites, prejudices, and aversions – can be so happy, or even one-half so happy, as he can be in the United States. Going farther, I lay down the proposition that it is a sheer physical impossibility for such a man to live there and *not* be happy – that it is as impossible to him as it would be to a schoolboy to weep over the burning down of his school-house. If he says that he isn't happy there, then he either lies or is insane. There the business of getting a living, particularly since the war brought the loot of all Europe to the national strong-box, is enormously easier than it is in any other Christian land – so easy, in fact, that an educated and forehanded man who fails at it must actually make deliberate efforts to that end. There the general average of intelligence, of knowledge, of competence, of integrity, of self-respect, of honour is so low that any man who knows his trade, does not fear ghosts, has read fifty good books, and practises the common decencies stands out as brilliantly as a wart on a bald head, and is thrown willy-nilly into a meagre and exclusive aristocracy. And there, more than anywhere else that I know of or have heard of, the daily panorama of human existence, of private and communal folly – the unending procession of govern-

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mental extortions and chicaneries, of commercial brigandages and throat-slittings, of theological buffooneries, of æsthetic ribaldries, of legal swindles and harlotries, of miscellaneous rogueries, villainies, imbecilities, grotesqueries, and extravagances – is so inordinately gross and preposterous, so perfectly brought up to the highest conceivable amperage, so steadily enriched with an almost fabulous daring and originality, that only the man who was born with a petrified diaphragm can fail to laugh himself to sleep every night, and to awake every morning with all the eager, unflagging expectation of an Iowa Wesleyan touring the Paris peep-shows.

A certain sough of rhetoric may be here. Perhaps I yield to words. But fundamentally I am quite sincere. For example, in the matter of attaining ease in Zion, of getting a fair share of the national swag, now piled so mountainously high. It seems to me, sunk in my Egyptian night, that the man who fails to do this in the United States to-day is a man who is somehow stupid – maybe not on the surface, but certainly deep down. Either he is one who cripples himself unduly, say by setting up a family before he can care for it, or by making a bad bargain for the sale of his wares, or by concerning himself too much about the affairs of other men; or he is one who endeavours fatuously to sell something that no normal American wants. Whenever I hear an American epic poet or metaphysician complain that his wife has eloped with some cinema actor or bootlegger who can at least feed and clothe her, my natural sympathy for the man is greatly corrupted by contempt for his lack of sense.

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Would it be regarded as sane and laudable for a man to travel the Sudan trying to sell fountain-pens, or Greenland offering to teach bookkeeping or counterpoint? Coming closer to the American scene, would the judicious pity or laugh at a man who opened a shop for the sale of incunabula in Little Rock, Ark., or who demanded a living in McKeesport, Pa., on the ground that he could read Sumerian? In precisely the same way it seemed to me to be nonsensical for a man to offer generally some commodity that only a few rare and dubious Americans want, and then weep and beat his breast because he is not patronized. One seeking to make a living in a country must pay due regard to the needs and tastes of that country. In the United States there are no jobs for Grand Dukes, and none for *wirkliche Geheimräte*, and none for palace eunuchs, and none for masters of the buckhounds, and very few for oboe-players, metaphysicians, astrophysicists, Assyriologists, water-colourists, stylites and epic poets. There may come a time when the composer of string quartettes is paid as much as a railway guard, but it is not yet. Then why practise such trades – that is, as trades? The man of independent means may venture into them prudently; when he does so, he is seldom molested; it may even be argued that he performs a public service by adopting them. But the man who has a living to make is simply silly if he goes into them; he is like a soldier going over the top with a coffin strapped to his back. Let him abandon such puerile vanities, and take to the Uplift instead, as, indeed, thousands of other victims of the Henry Ford industrial system have already done.

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Let him bear in mind that, whatever its neglect of the humanities and their monks, the Republic has never got half enough stockbrokers, quack doctors, phrenologists, Methodist evangelists, circus clowns, magicians, soldiers, farmers, popular song writers, forgers of gin labels, detectives, spies, snoopers, and *agents provocateurs*. The rules are set by Omnipotence; the discreet man observes them. Observing them, he is safe beneath the starry bed-tick, in fair weather or foul. The *boobus Americanus* is a bird that knows no close season — and if he won't come down to Texas oil stock, or one-night cancer cures, or building lots in Swampshurt, he will always come down to Inspiration and Optimism, whether political, theological, pedagogical, literary, or economic.

The doctrine that it is *infra dignitatem* for an educated man to take a hand in the snaring of this goose is one in which I see nothing convincing. It is a doctrine chiefly voiced, I believe, by those who have tried the business and failed. They take refuge behind the childish notion that there is something honourable about poverty *per se*. This is nonsense. Poverty may be an unescapable misfortune, but that no more makes it honourable than a squint is made honourable by the same cause. Do I advocate, then, the ceaseless, senseless hogging of money? I do not. All I advocate — and praise as virtuous — is the hogging of enough to provide security and ease. Despite all the romantic superstitions to the contrary, the artist cannot do his best work when he is oppressed by unsatisfied wants. Nor can the philosopher. Nor can the man of science. The best and clearest thinking of the world is done and the

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finest art is produced, not by men who are hungry, ragged and harassed, but by men who are well-fed, warm and easy in mind. It is the artist's first duty to his art to achieve that tranquillity for himself. Shakespeare tried to achieve it; so did Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms, Ibsen, and Balzac. Goethe, Schopenhauer, Schumann and Mendelssohn were born to it. Joseph Conrad, Richard Strauss and Anatole France got it for themselves in our own day. In the older countries, where competence is far more general and competition is thus more sharp, the thing is often cruelly difficult, and sometimes almost impossible. But in the United States it is absurdly easy, given ordinary luck. Any man with a superior air, the intelligence of a stockbroker, and the resolution of a *commissionaire* – in brief, any man who believes in himself enough, and with sufficient cause, to be called a journeyman – can cadge enough money, in the glorious commonwealth of half-wits, to make life soft for him.

And if a lining for the purse is thus facilely obtainable, given a reasonable prudence and resourcefulness, then balm for the ego is just as unlaboriously got, given ordinary dignity and decency. Simply to exist, indeed, on the plane of a civilized man is to attain, in the Republic, to a distinction that should be enough for all save the most vain; it is even likely to be too much, as the frequent challenges of the Ku Klux Klan, the American Legion, the Anti-Saloon League, and other such vigilance committees of the majority testify. Here is a country in which all political thought and activity are concentrated upon the scramble for jobs – in which the normal politician,

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whether he be a President or a village road supervisor, is willing to renounce any principle, however precious to him, and to adopt any lunacy, however offensive to him, in order to keep his place at the trough. Go into politics, then, without seeking or wanting office, and at once you are as conspicuous as a red-haired blackamoor – in fact, a great deal more conspicuous, for red-haired blackamoors have been seen, but who has ever seen or heard of an American politician, Democrat or Republican, Socialist or Liberal, Whig or Tory, who did not itch for a job? Again, here is a country in which it is an axiom that a business man shall be an admirer of Charles M. Schwab, a reader of the *Saturday Evening Post*, a golfer – in brief, a vegetable. Spend your hours of escape from business reading Remy de Gourmont or practising the violoncello, and the local Sunday newspaper will infallibly find you out and hymn the marvel – nay, your banker will summon you to discuss your notes, and your rivals will spread the report (probably truthful) that you were pro-German during the war. Yet again, here is a land in which women rule and men are slaves. Train your women to get your slippers for you, and your ill fame will match Galileo's or Darwin's. Once more, here is the Paradise of back-slappers, of democrats, of mixers, of go-getters. Maintain ordinary reserve, and you will arrest instant attention – and have your hand kissed by multitudes who, despite democracy, have all the inferior man's unquenchable desire to grovel and admire.

Nowhere else in the world is superiority more easily attained or more eagerly admitted. The chief business of

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the nation, as a nation, is the setting up of heroes, mainly bogus. It admired the literary style of the late Woodrow; it respected the theological passion of Bryan; it venerated J. Pierpont Morgan; it takes Congress seriously; it would be unutterably shocked by the proposition (with proof) that a majority of its judges are ignoramuses, and that a respectable minority of them are scoundrels. The manufacture of artificial dignitaries and even gods goes on feverishly and incessantly; the will to worship never flags. Ten iron-moulders meet in the back-room of a groggery, organize a lodge of the Noble and Mystic Order of American Rosicrucians, and elect a wheelwright Supreme Worthy Whimwham; a month later they send a notice to the local newspaper that they have been greatly honoured by an official visit from that Whimwham, and that they plan to give him a jewelled fob for his watch-chain. The chief national heroes – Lincoln, Lee, and so on – cannot remain mere men. The mysticism of the mediæval peasantry gets into the communal view of them, and they begin to sprout haloes and wings. As I say, no intrinsic merit – at least, none commensurate with the mob estimate – is needed to come to such august dignities. Everything American is a bit amateurish and childish, even the national gods. The most conspicuous and respected American in nearly every field of endeavour, saving only the purely commercial (I exclude even the financial) is a man who would attract little attention in any other country. The leading American critic of literature, after twenty years of diligent exposition of his ideas, has yet to make it clear what he is in favour of, and why.

The queen of the *haut monde*, in almost every American city, is a woman who regards any recently created British peer as an aristocrat, and whose grandfather slept in his underclothes. The leading American musical director, if he went to Leipzig, would be put to polishing trombones and copying drum parts. The leading American philosopher (now dead, with no successor) spent a lifetime erecting an epistemological defence for the national æsthetic maxim: 'I don't know nothing about music, but I know what I like.' The most eminent statesman the United States has produced since Lincoln, was fooled by Arthur James Balfour, and miscalculated his public support by more than 5,000,000 votes. And the current Chief Magistrate of the nation — its defiant substitute for tsar and kaiser — is a small-town solicitor who, when he wishes to enjoy himself in the Executive Mansion, invites in a shopkeeper, a professional dealer in political jobs, and a newspaper reporter.

§ 2

All of which may be boiled down to this: that the United States is essentially a commonwealth of third-rate men — that distinction is easy within its bounds because the general level of culture, of information, of taste and judgment, of ordinary competence is so low. No sane man, employing an American plumber to repair a leaky drain, would expect him to do it at the first trial, and in precisely the same way no sane man, observing an American Secretary of State in negotiation with the Japs, would expect him to come off better than second

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best. Third-rate men, of course, exist in all countries, but it is only in the United States that they are in full control of the State, and with it of all the national standards. The land was peopled, not by the hardy adventurers of legend, but simply by incompetents who could not get on at home, and the lavishness of nature that they found there, the vast ease with which they could get livings, confirmed and augmented their native incompetence. No American colonist, even in the worst days of the Indian wars, ever had to face such hardships as ground down the peasants of Central Europe during the Hundred Years War, not even such hardships as oppressed the English lower classes during the century before the Reform Bill of 1832. In most of the colonies, indeed, he seldom saw any Indians at all: the one thing that made life difficult for him was his congenital stupidity. The winning of the West, so rhetorically celebrated in American romance, cost the lives of fewer men than the single battle of Tannenberg, and the victory was much easier and surer. The immigrants who have come in since those early days have been, if anything, of even lower grade than their forerunners. The old notion that the United States is peopled by the offspring of brave, idealistic and liberty-loving minorities, who revolted against injustice, bigotry and mediævalism at home – this notion is fast succumbing to the alarmed study that has been given of late to the immigration of recent years. The truth is that the majority of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants since the Revolution, like the majority of Anglo-Saxon immigrants before the Revolution, have been, not

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the superior men of their native lands, but the botched and unfit: Irishmen starving to death in Ireland, Germans unable to weather the *Sturm und Drang* of the post-Napoleonic reorganization, Italians weed-grown on exhausted soil, Scandinavians run to all bone and no brain, Jews too incompetent to swindle even the barbarous peasants of Russia, Poland, and Rumania. Here and there among the immigrants, of course, there may be a bravo, but the average new-comer is, and always has been, simply a poor fish.

Nor is there much soundness in the common assumption, so beloved of American rhetoricians, that the people of the country constitute 'the youngest of the great peoples.' The phrase turns up endlessly; the average American leader-writer would be hamstrung if the post office suddenly interdicted it, as it interdicted 'the right to rebel' during the war. What gives it a certain specious plausibility is the fact that the Republic, compared to a few other existing Governments, is relatively young. But the Republic is not necessarily identical with the American people; they might overturn it to-morrow and set up a monarchy, and still remain the same people. The truth is that, as a distinct nation, they go back fully three hundred years, and that even their Government is older than that of most other nations, *e.g.*, France, Italy, Germany, Russia. Moreover, it is absurd to say that there is anything properly describable as youthfulness in the American outlook. It is not that of young men, but that of old men. All the characteristics of senescence are in it: a great distrust of ideas, an habitual timorousness,

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a harsh fidelity to a few fixed beliefs, a touch of mysticism. The average American is a prude and a pietist under his skin, and the fact is never more evident than when he is trying to disprove it. His vices are not those of a healthy boy, but those of an ancient paralytic. If you would penetrate to the causes thereof, simply go to Ellis Island and look at the next shipload of immigrants. You will not find the spring of youth in their ship; you will find the shuffling of exhausted men. From such exhausted men the American stock has sprung. It was easier for them to survive in the United States than it was where they came from, but that ease, though it made them feel stronger, did not actually strengthen them. It left them what they were when they came: weary peasants, eager only for the comfortable security of a pig in a sty. Out of that eagerness has issued many of the noblest manifestations of American *Kultur*: the national fear of war, the pervasive suspicion of the aims and intents of all other nations, the short way with heretics and disturbers of the peace, the unshakable belief in devils, the implacable hostility to every novel idea and point of view.

All these ways of thinking are the marks of the peasant – more, of the peasant long ground into the mud of his wallow, and determined at last to stay there – the peasant who has definitely renounced any lewd desire he may have ever had to gape at the stars. The habits of mind of this dull, sempiternal *fellah* – the oldest man in Christendom – are, with a few modifications, the habits of mind of the American people. The peasant has a great practical cunning, but he is unable to see any farther than the

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next farm. He likes money and knows how to amass property, but his cultural development is but little above that of the domestic animals. He is intensely and cocksurely moral, but his morality and his self-interest are crudely identical. He is emotional and easy to scare, but his imagination cannot grasp an abstraction. He is a violent nationalist and patriot, but he admires rogues in office, and always beats the tax-collector if he can. He has immovable opinions about all the great affairs of State, but nine-tenths of them are imbecilities. He is violently jealous of what he conceives to be his rights, but brutally disregardful of the other fellow's. He is religious, but his religion is wholly devoid of beauty and dignity. This man, whether city or country bred, is the normal Americano — the 100 per cent Methodist, Odd Fellow, Ku Kluxer, and Know Nothing. He exists in all countries, but in America alone he rules — there alone his anthropoid fears and rages are accepted gravely as logical ideas, and dissent from them is punished as a public offence. Around every one of his principal delusions — of the sacredness of democracy, of the feasibility of sumptuary law, of the incurable sinfulness of all other peoples, of the menace of ideas, of the corruption lying in all the arts — there is thrown a barrier of taboos, and woe to the anarchist who seeks to break it down!

The multiplication of such taboos is obviously not characteristic of a culture that is moving from a lower plane to a higher — that is, of a culture still in the full glow of its youth. It is a sign, rather, of a culture that is slipping downhill — one that is reverting to the most primi-

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tive standards and ways of thought. The taboo, indeed, is the trade-mark of the savage, and wherever it exists it is a relentless and effective enemy of civilized enlightenment. The savage is the most meticulously moral of men; there is scarcely an act of his daily life that is not conditioned by unyielding prohibition and obligations, most of them logically unintelligible. The mob-man, a savage set amid civilization, cherishes a code of the same draconian kind. He believes firmly that right and wrong are immovable things – that they have an actual and unchangeable existence, and that any challenge of them, by word or act, is a crime against society. And with the concept of wrongness, of course, he always confuses the concept of mere differentness – to him the two are indistinguishable. Anything strange is to be combated: it is of the Devil. The American mob-man cannot grasp ideas in their native nakedness. They must be dramatized and personalized for him, and provided with either white wings or forked tails. All discussion of them, to interest him, must take the form of a pursuit and scotching of demons. He cannot think of a heresy without thinking of a heretic to be caught, condemned, and burned.

The Fathers of the Republic, I am convinced, had a great deal more prevision than even their most romantic worshippers give them credit for. They not only sought to create a governmental machine that would be safe from attack without, they also sought to create one that would be safe from attack within. They invented very ingenious devices for holding the mob in check, for

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protecting the national policy against its transient and illogical rages, for securing the determination of all the larger matters of State to a concealed, but none the less real, aristocracy. Nothing could have been farther from the intent of Washington, Hamilton, and even Jefferson, than that the official doctrines of the nation, in the year 1927, should be identical with the nonsense heard from the evangelical pulpit, and on the hustings. But Jackson and his merry men broke through the barbed wires thus so carefully strung, and ever since 1825 *vox populi* has been the true voice of the nation. To-day there is no longer any question of statesmanship, in any real sense, in American politics. The only way to success in public life lies in flattering and kowtowing to the mob. A candidate for office, even the highest, must either adopt its current manias *en bloc*, or convince it hypocritically that he has done so, while cherishing reservations *in petto*. The result is that only two sorts of men stand any chance whatever of getting into actual control of affairs — first, glorified mob-men who genuinely believe what the mob believes, and secondly, shrewd fellows who are willing to make any sacrifice of conviction and self-respect in order to hold their places. One finds perfect examples of the first class in Jackson and Bryan. One finds hundreds of specimens of the second among the politicians who got themselves so affectingly converted to Prohibition, and who voted and blubbered for it with flasks in their pockets. Even on the highest planes American politics seems to be incurably mountebankish. The same Senators who raised such raucous alarms against the

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League of Nations voted for the Disarmament Treaty – a far more obvious surrender to European ideas. And the same Senators who pleaded for the League on the ground that its failure would break the heart of the world were eloquently against the treaty. The few men who maintained a consistent course in both cases, voting either for or against both League and treaty, were denounced by the newspapers as deliberate marplots, and found their constituents rising against them. To such an extent had the American public become accustomed to bunkum that simple honesty was incomprehensible to it, and hence abhorrent!

As I have pointed out in a previous work, this dominance of mob ways of thinking, this pollution of the whole intellectual life of the country by the prejudices and emotions of the rabble, goes unchallenged in the United States because the old landed aristocracy of the colonial era has been engulfed and almost obliterated by the rise of the industrial system, and no new aristocracy has arisen to take its place and discharge its highly necessary functions. An upper class, of course, exists, and of late it has tended to increase in power, but it is culturally almost indistinguishable from the mob: it lacks absolutely anything even remotely resembling an aristocratic point of view. One searches in vain for any sign of the true *Junker* spirit in the Vanderbilts, Astors, Morgans, Garys, and other such earls and dukes of the plutocracy; their culture, like their aspiration, remains that of the pawnshop. One searches in vain, too, for the aloof air of the don in the official *intelligentsia* of the American uni-

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versities; they are timorous and orthodox, and constitute a reptile Congregatio de Propaganda Fide to match Bismarck's *Reptilien Presse*. Everywhere else on earth, despite the rise of democracy, an organized minority of aristocrats survives from a more spacious day, and if its personnel has degenerated and its legal powers have decayed it has at least maintained some vestige of its old independence of spirit, and jealously guarded its old right to be heard without risk of penalty. Even in England, where the peerage has been debauched to the level of a political baptismal font for Jewish moneylenders and Wesleyan soap-boilers, there is sanctuary for the old order in the two ancient universities, and a lingering respect for it in the peasantry. But in the United States it was paralysed by Jackson and got its death-blow from Grant, and since then no successor to it has been evolved. Thus there is no organized force to oppose the irrational vagaries of the mob. The legislative and executive arms of the Government yield to them without resistance; the judicial arm has begun to yield almost as supinely, particularly when they take the form of witch-hunts; outside the official circle there is no opposition that is even dependably articulate. The worst excesses go almost without challenge. Discussion, when it is heard at all, is feeble and superficial, and girt about by the taboos that I have mentioned. The clatter about the so-called Ku Klux Klan, four or five years ago, was typical. The astounding programme of this organization was discussed in the newspapers for months on end, and a committee of Congress sat in solemn state to investigate it, and yet not a single

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newspaper or Congressman, so far as I am aware, so much as mentioned the most patent and important fact about it, to wit, that the Ku Klux was, to all intents and purposes, simply the secular arm of the Methodist Church, and that its methods were no more than physical projections of the familiar extravagances of the Anti-Saloon League. The intimate relations between Church and Klan, amounting almost to identity, must have been plain to every intelligent American, and yet the taboo upon the realistic consideration of ecclesiastical matters was sufficient to make every public soothsayer disregard it completely.

I often wonder, indeed, if there would be any intellectual life at all in the United States if it were not for the steady importation in bulk of ideas from abroad, and particularly, in late years, from England. What would become of the average American scholar if he could not borrow wholesale from English scholars? How could an inquisitive youth get beneath the surface of our politics if it were not for such anatomists as Bryce? How could our young professors formulate æsthetic judgments, especially in the field of letters, if it were not for such gifted English mentors as the late Dr. Robertson Nicoll? By what process, finally, would the true style of a calling card be determined, and the *höflich* manner of eating artichokes, if there were no reports from Mayfair? On certain levels this naïve subservience must needs irritate the more self-respecting variety of American. Ever since the day of Lowell – even since the day of Cooper and Irving – there have been denunciations of it. But how-

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ever unpleasant it may be, there is no denying that a chain of logical causes lies behind it, and that they are not to be disposed of by objecting to them. The average American of the Anglo-Saxon majority, in truth, is simply a second-rate Englishman, and so it is no wonder that he is spontaneously servile, despite all his democratic denial of superiorities, to what he conceives to be first-rate Englishmen. He corresponds, roughly, to an English Nonconformist of the better-fed variety, and he shows all the familiar characters of the breed. He is truculent and cocksure, and yet he knows how to take off his hat when a bishop of the Establishment passes. He is hot against the dukes, and yet the notice of a concrete duke is a singing in his heart. It seems to me that this inferior Anglo-Saxon is losing his old dominance in the United States – that is, biologically. But he will keep his cultural primacy for a long, long while, in spite of the overwhelming inrush of men of other races, if only because those new-comers are even more clearly inferior than he is. Nine-tenths of the Italians, for example, who have emigrated to America in late years, have brought no more of the essential culture of Italy with them than so many horned cattle would have brought. If they become civilized at all, it is the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon majority that they acquire, which is to say, the civilization of the English second table. So with the Germans, the Scandinavians, and even the Jews and Irish. The Germans, taking one with another, are on the cultural level of greengrocers. I have come into contact with a great many of them since 1914, some of them of con-

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siderable wealth, and even of fashionable pretensions. In the whole lot I can think of but a score or two who could name offhand the principal works of Thomas Mann, Otto Julius Bierbaum, Ludwig Thoma, or Hugo von Hofmannsthal. They know much more about Charlie Chaplin than they know about Goethe. The Scandinavians are even worse. The majority of them are mere clods, and they are sucked into the Wesleyan orbit almost as soon as they land; it is by no means a mere accident that the National Prohibition Enforcement Act bears the name of a man theoretically of the blood of Gustavus Vasa, Svend of the Forked Beard, and Eric the Red. The Irish in the United States are scarcely touched by the revival of Irish culture, despite their melodramatic concern with Irish politics. During the war they supplied diligent and dependable agents to the Anglo-Saxon White Terror, and at all times they are very susceptible to political and social bribery. As for the Jews, they change their names to Burton, Thompson and Cecil in order to qualify as true Americans, and when they are accepted and rewarded in the national coin they renounce Moses altogether and get themselves baptized.

§ 3

In rainy weather, when my old wounds ache and the four humours do battle in my spleen, I often find myself speculating sourly as to the future of the Republic. Native opinion, of course, is to the effect that it will be secure and glorious; the superstition that progress must always be upward and onward will not down; in

virulence and popularity it matches the superstition that money can accomplish anything. But this view is not shared by most reflective foreigners, as anyone may find out by looking in such a book as Ferdinand Kürnberger's *Der Amerikamüde*, Sholom Asch's *America*, André Siegfried's *Les Etats-Unis d'Aujourd'hui*, Ernest von Wolzogen's *Ein Dichter in Dollarica*, W. L. George's *Hail, Columbia!*, Annalise Schmidt's *Der Amerikanische Mensch*, or Henryk Sienkiewicz's *After Bread*, or by hearkening unto the confidences, if obtainable, of such returned immigrants as Georges Clemenceau, Knut Hamsun, George Santayana, Clemens von Pirquet, John Masefield and Maxim Gorky, and, via the Society for Psychological Research, Antonin Dvořák, Frank Wedekind, and Edwin Klebs. The American Republic, as nations go, has led a safe and easy life, with no serious enemies to menace it, either within or without, and no grim struggle with want. Getting a living within its bounds has always been easier than anywhere else in Christendom; getting a secure foothold has been possible to whole classes of men who would have remained submerged in Europe, as the character of the American plutocracy, and no less of the *intelligentsia*, so brilliantly shows. The American people have never had to face such titanic assaults as those suffered by the people of Holland, Poland, and half a dozen other little countries; they have not lived with a ring of powerful enemies about them, as the Germans have lived since the Middle Ages; they have not been torn by class wars, as the French, the Spaniards and the Russians have been torn; they have not thrown their strength

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into far-flung and exhausting colonial enterprises, like the English. All their foreign wars have been fought with foes either too weak to resist them or too heavily engaged elsewhere to make more than a half-hearted attempt. The combats with Mexico and Spain were not wars: they were simply lynchings. Even the Civil War, compared to the larger European conflicts since the invention of gunpowder, was trivial in its character and transient in its effects. The population of the United States, when it began, was about 31,500,000 – say 10 per cent under the population of France in 1914. But after four years of struggle, the number of men killed in action or dead of wounds, in the two armies, came to but 200,000 – probably little more than an eighth of the total losses of France between 1914 and 1918. Nor was there any very extensive destruction of property. In all save a small area in the Northern States there was none at all, and even in the South only a few towns of any importance were destroyed. The average Northerner passed through the four years scarcely aware, save by report, that a war was going on. In the South the breath of Mars blew more hotly, but even there large numbers of men escaped service, and the general hardship everywhere fell a great deal short of the hardships suffered by the Belgians, the French of the North, the Germans of East Prussia, and the Serbians and Rumanians in the World War. The agonies of the South have been much exaggerated in popular romance; they were probably more severe during Reconstruction, when they were chiefly psychical, than they were during the actual war.

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Certainly General Robert E. Lee was in a favourable position to estimate the military achievement of the Confederacy. Well, Lee was of the opinion that his army was very badly supported by the civil population, and that its final disaster was largely due to that ineffective support.

Coming down to the time of the World War, one finds precious few signs that the American people, facing an antagonist of equal strength and with both hands free, could be relied upon to give a creditable account of themselves. The American share in that great struggle, in fact, was marked by poltroonery almost as conspicuously as it was marked by knavery. Let us consider briefly what the nation did. For a few months it viewed the struggle idly and unintelligently, as a yokel might stare at a sword-swallower at a fair. Then, seeing a chance to profit, it undertook with sudden alacrity the ghoulisn office of *Kriegslieferant*. One of the contestants being debarred, by the chances of war, from buying, it devoted its whole energies, for two years, to purveying to the other. Meanwhile, it made every effort to aid its customer by lending him the cloak of its neutrality – that is, by demanding all the privileges of a neutral and yet carrying on a stupendous wholesale effort to promote the war. On the official side, this neutrality was fraudulent from the start, as the revelations of Mr. Tumulty have since demonstrated; popularly it became more and more fraudulent as the debts of the customer contestant piled up, and it became more and more apparent – a fact diligently made known by his partisans – that they would be worthless if he failed to win. Then, in the end, covert aid was transformed into

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overt aid. And under what gallant conditions! In brief, there stood a nation of 65,000,000 people, which, without effective allies, had just closed two and a half years of Homeric conflict by completely defeating an enemy State of 135,000,000 and two lesser ones of more than 10,000,000 together, and now stood at bay before a combination of at least 140,000,000. Upon this battle-scarred and war-weary foe the Republic of 100,000,000 freemen now flung itself, so lifting the odds to 4 to 1. And after a year and a half more of struggle it emerged triumphant – a knightly victor surely!

There is no need to rehearse the astounding and unprecedented swinishness that accompanied this glorious business – the colossal waste of public money, the savage persecution of all opponents and critics of the war, the bribery of labour, the half-insane reviling of the enemy, the manufacture of false news, the knavish robbery of enemy civilians, the incessant spy hunts, the floating of public loans by a process of blackmail, the degradation of the Red Cross to partisan uses, the complete abandonment of all decency, decorum and self-respect. The facts must be remembered with shame by every civilized American. But more important to the present purpose are two things that are apt to be overlooked, the first of which is the capital fact that the war was ‘sold’ to the American people, as the national phrase has it, not by appealing to their courage, but by appealing to their cowardice – in brief, by adopting the assumption that they were not warlike at all, and certainly not gallant and chivalrous, but merely craven and fearful. The first

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selling point of the proponents of American participation was the contention that the Germans, with gigantic wars still raging on both fronts, were preparing to invade the United States, burn down all the towns, murder all the men, and carry off all the women – that their victory would bring staggering and irresistible reprisals for the American violation of the duties of a neutral. The second selling point was that the entrance of the United States would end the war almost instantly – that the Germans would be so overwhelmingly outnumbered, in men and guns, that it would be impossible for them to make any effective defence – above all, that it would be impossible for them to inflict any serious damage upon their new foes. Neither argument, it must be plain, showed the slightest belief in the warlike skill and courage of the American people. Both were grounded upon the frank theory that the only way to make the mob fight was to scare it half to death, and then show it a way to fight without risk, to stab a helpless antagonist in the back. And both were mellowed and reinforced by the hint that such a noble assault, beside being safe, would also be extremely profitable – that it would convert very dubious debts into very good debts, and dispose for ever of a diligent and dangerous competitor for trade, especially in Latin America. All the idealist nonsense emitted by Dr. Wilson and company was simply icing on the cake. Most of it was abandoned as soon as the bullets began to fly, and the rest consisted simply of meaningless words – the idiotic babbling of a Presbyterian evangelist turned prophet and seer.

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The other thing that needs to be remembered is the permanent effect of so dishonest and cowardly a business upon the national character, already far too much inclined toward easy ventures and long odds. Somewhere in his diaries Wilfrid Scawen Blunt speaks of the marked debasement that showed itself in the English spirit after the brutal robbery and assassination of the South African Republics. The heroes that the mob followed after Mafeking Day were far inferior to the heroes that it had followed in the days before the war. The English gentleman began to disappear from public life, and in his place appeared a bounder obviously almost identical with the American professional politician. Worse, old ideals went with old heroes. Personal freedom and strict legality, says Blunt, vanished from the English tables of the law, and there was a shift of the social and political centre of gravity to a lower plane. Precisely the same effect is now visible in the United States. The overwhelming majority of conscripts went into the army unwillingly, and once there they were debauched by the twin forces of the official propaganda that I have mentioned and a harsh, unintelligent discipline. The first made them almost incapable of soldierly thought and conduct; the second converted them into cringing goose-steppers. The consequences display themselves in the amazing activities of the American Legion, and in the rise of such correlative organizations as the Ku Klux Klan. It is impossible to fit any reasonable concept of the soldierly into the familiar proceedings of the Legion. Its members conduct themselves like a gang of vice-

crusaders on the loose, or a Georgia lynching party. They are for ever discovering preposterous burglars under the national bed, and they advance to the attack, not gallantly and at fair odds, but cravenly and in overwhelming force. Some of their enterprises have been of almost unbelievable baseness – the mobbing of harmless Socialists, the prohibition of concerts by musicians of enemy nationality, the mutilation of cows designed for shipment abroad to feed starving children, the roughing of women, service as strike-breakers, the persecution of helpless foreigners, regardless of nationality. Nothing quite resembling this dreadful organization existed in the country before the war, not even in the South. There is nothing like it anywhere else on earth. It is a typical product of two years of heroic effort to arouse and capitalize the worst instincts of the mob, and it symbolizes very dramatically the ill effects of that effort upon the general American character.

Would men so degraded in gallantry and honour, so completely purged of all the military virtues, so submerged in baseness of spirit – would such pitiful caricatures of soldiers offer the necessary resistance to a public enemy who was equal, or perhaps superior, in men and resources, and who came on with confidence, daring and resolution – say England supported by Germany as *Kriegslieferant* and with her inevitable swarms of Continental allies, or Japan with the Asiatic hordes behind her? Against the best opinion of the patriotic American Press, I presume to doubt it. It seems to me quite certain, indeed, that an American army fairly representing the American

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people, if it ever meets another army of anything remotely resembling like strength, will be defeated, and that defeat will be indistinguishable from rout. I believe that, at any odds less than two to one, even the exhausted Germany army of 1918 would have defeated it, and in this view, I think, I am joined by many men whose military judgment is far better than mine – particularly by many English and French officers. The changes in the American character since the Civil War, due partly to the wearing out of the old Anglo-Saxon stock, inferior to begin with, and partly to the infusion of the worst elements of other stocks, have surely not made for the fostering of the military virtues. The old cool head is gone, and the old dogged way with difficulties. The typical American of to-day has lost all the love of liberty that his forefathers had, and all their distrust of emotion, and pride in self-reliance. He is led no longer by Davy Crocketts; he is led by cheer leaders, Press agents, word-mongers, uplifters. I do not believe that such a faint-hearted and inflammatory fellow, shoved into a war demanding every resource of courage, ingenuity and pertinacity, would give a good account of himself. He is fit for lynching-bees and heretic-hunts, but he is not fit for tight corners and desperate odds.

Nevertheless, his docility and pusillanimity may be overestimated, and sometimes I think that they *are* overestimated by his present masters. They assume that there is absolutely no limit to his capacity for being knocked about – that he will submit to any invasion of his freedom and dignity, however outrageous, so long

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as it is depicted in melodious terms. He permitted the late war to be 'sold' to him by the methods of the auctioneer. He submitted to conscription without any of the resistance shown by his brother democrats of Canada and Australia. He got no farther than academic protests against the brutal usage he had to face in the army. He came home and found Prohibition foisted on him, and contented himself with a few feeble objections. He is a pliant slave of capitalism, and ever ready to help it put down fellow-slaves who venture to revolt. But this very weakness, this very credulity and poverty of spirit, on some easily conceivable to-morrow, may convert him into a rebel of a peculiarly insane kind, and so beset the Republic from within with difficulties quite as formidable as those which threaten to afflict it from without. What Mr. James N. Wood calls the corsair of democracy – that is, the professional mob-master, the merchant of delusions, the pumper-up of popular fears and rages – is still content to work for capitalism, and capitalism knows how to reward him to his taste. He is the eloquent statesman, the patriotic editor, the fount of inspiration, the prancing milch-cow of optimism. He becomes public leader, Governor, Senator, President. His, perhaps, is the best of trades under democracy – but it has its temptations! Let us try to picture a master corsair, thoroughly adept at pulling the mob nose, who suddenly bethought himself of that Pepin the Short who found himself mayor of the palace and made himself King of the Franks. There were lightnings along the horizon in the days of Roosevelt; there were thunder growls when Bryan

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emerged from the Nebraska steppes. On some great day of fate, as yet unrevealed by the gods, such a professor of the central democratic science may throw off his employers and set up a business for himself. When that day comes there will be plenty of excuse for black type on the contents bills of the newspapers.

I incline to think that military disaster will give him his inspiration and his opportunity – that he will take the form, so dear to democracies, of a man on horseback. The chances are bad to-day simply because the American mob is relatively comfortable – because capitalism has been able to give it a gaudy ease and plenty of food in return for its docility. Genuine poverty is very rare in the United States, and actual hardship is almost unknown. There are times when the proletariat is short of gramophone records, silk shirts and cinema tickets, but there are few times when it is short of nourishment. Even during the most severe business depression, with hundreds of thousands out of work, most of these apparent sufferers, if they are willing, are able to get livings outside their trades. The cities may be choked with idle men, but the country is nearly always short of labour. And if all other resources fail, there are always public agencies to feed the hungry: capitalism is careful to keep them from despair. No American knows what it means to live as millions of Europeans lived during the war and have lived, in some places, since: with the loaves of the baker reduced to half size and no meat at all in the butcher's shop. But the time may come and it may not be far off. A national military disaster would disorganize all industry

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in the United States, already sufficiently wasteful and chaotic, and introduce the American people, for the first time in their history, to genuine want – and capital would be unable to relieve them. The day of such disaster will bring the saviour foreordained. The slaves will follow him, their eyes fixed ecstatically upon the newest New Jerusalem. Men bred to respond automatically to shibboleths will respond to this worst and most insane one. Bolshevism, said General Foch, is a disease of defeated nations.

§ 4

All the while I have been forgetting the third of my reasons for remaining so faithful a citizen of the Federation, despite all the lascivious inducements from expatriates to join them in permanent exile beyond the seas, and all the surly suggestions from patriots that I succumb. It is the reason which grows out of my mediæval but unashamed taste for the bizarre and indelicate, my congenital weakness for comedy of the grosser varieties. The United States, to my eye, is incomparably the greatest show on earth. It is a show which avoids diligently all the kinds of clowning which tire me most quickly – for example, royal ceremonials, the tedious hocus-pocus of *haut politique*, the taking of politics seriously – and lays chief stress upon the kinds which delight me unceasingly – for example, the ribald combats of demagogues, the exquisitely ingenious operations of master rogues, the pursuit of witches and heretics, the desperate struggle of inferior men to claw their way into heaven. There are clowns in con-

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stant practice in the United States who are as far above the clowns of any other great State as a Gene Tunney is above a paralytic – and not a few dozen or score of them, but whole droves and herds. Human enterprises which, in all other Christian countries, are resigned despairingly to an incurable dullness – things that seem devoid of exhilarating amusement by their very nature – are there lifted to such vast heights of buffoonery that contemplating them strains the midriff almost to breaking. I cite an example: the worship of God. Everywhere else on earth it is carried on in a solemn and dispiriting manner; in England, of course, the bishops are grotesque, but the average man seldom gets a fair chance to laugh at them and enjoy them. But turn to the United States. There one not only finds bishops who are enormously more comic than even the most gifted of the English bishops: there one also finds a huge force of lesser specialists in ecclesiastical mountebankery – raggety Loyolas, Savonarolas and Xaviers of a hundred fantastic rites, each performing untiringly and each full of a grotesque and illimitable whimsicality. Every American town, however small, has one of its own: a holy clerk with so fine a talent for introducing the arts of jazz into the salvation of the damned that his performance takes on all the gaudiness of a four-ring circus, and the bald announcement that he will raid hell on such and such a night is enough to empty all the town bordellos and pack his sanctuary to the doors. And to aid him and inspire him there are travelling experts to whom he stands in the relation of a wart to the Matterhorn – stupendous masters of theolo-

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gical imbecility, contrivers of doctrines utterly preposterous, heirs to the Joseph Smith, Mother Eddy and John Alexander Dowie tradition – Billy Sunday, Aimée McPherson, and their like. These are the eminences of the American Sacred College. I delight in them. Their proceedings make me a happier American.

Turn, now, to politics. Consider, for example, a campaign for the Presidency. Would it be possible to imagine anything more uproariously idiotic – a deafening, nerve-racking battle to the death between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Harlequin and Sganarelle – the unspeakable, with fearful snorts, gradually swallowing the inconceivable? I defy anyone to match it elsewhere on this earth. In other lands, at worst, there are at least intelligible issues, coherent ideas, salient personalities. Somebody says something, and somebody replies. But what did Coolidge say in 1924, and what did Davis reply? Who was Coolidge, and who was Davis? Having perfected democracy, the American people lift the whole combat to symbolism, to transcendentalism, to metaphysics. They load a pair of palpably tin cannon with blank cartridges charged with talcum powder, and so let fly. One may howl over the show without any uneasy reminder that it is serious, and that someone may be hurt. I hold that this elevation of politics to the plane of undiluted comedy is peculiarly American, that nowhere else on this disreputable ball has the art of the sham-battle been developed to such fineness. Observing a German or French election one is uncomfortably harassed and stirred up; observing an English election one is tempted to weep.

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In the United States the thing is done better. There politics is purged of all menace, all sinister quality, all genuine significance, and stuffed with such gorgeous humours, such inordinate farce that one comes to the end of the combat with one's ribs loose, and ready for 'King Lear,' or a hanging, or a course of medical journals.

But feeling better for the laugh. *Ridi si sapiis*, said Martial. Mirth is necessary to wisdom, to comfort, above all, to happiness. Well, the United States is the land of mirth, as Germany is the land of metaphysics, and France is the land of fornication. There the buffoonery never stops. What could be more delightful than the endless struggle of the Puritan to make the joy of the minority unlawful and impossible? The effort is itself a greater joy to one standing on the side-lines than any or all of the carnal joys that it combats. Always, when I contemplate an American uplifter at his hopeless business, I recall a scene in an old-time burlesque, witnessed for hire in my days as a dramatic critic. A chorus girl executed a fall upon the stage, and Rudolph Krausemeyer, the Swiss comedian, rushed to her aid. As he stooped painfully to succour her, Irving Rabinovitz, the Zionist comedian, fetched him a fearful clout across the cofferdam with a slap-stick. So the uplifter, the soul-saver, the Americanizer, striving to make the Republic fit for Y.M.C.A. secretaries. He is the eternal American, ever moved by the best of intentions, ever running *à la* Krausemeyer to the rescue of virtue, and ever getting his pantaloon fanned by the Devil. I am naturally sinful, and such spectacles caress me. If the slap-stick were lethal

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the show would be cruel, and I'd probably complain to the *Polizei*. As it is, I know that the uplifter is not really hurt, but simply shocked. The blow, in fact, does him good, for it helps to get him into heaven, as exegetes prove from Matthew v, 11: *Heureux serez-vous, lorsqu'on vous outragera, qu'on vous persécutera*, and so on. As for me, it makes me a more contented man, and hence a better citizen. One man prefers the Republic because it pays better wages than Bulgaria. Another because it has laws to keep him sober and his daughter chaste. Another because the Woolworth Building is higher than the cathedral at Chartres. Another because there is a warrant for him somewhere else. Me, I like it because it amuses me to my taste. I never get tired of the show. It is worth every cent it costs.

CHAPTER II
NOTES ON THE HUMAN SPECIES

§ 1. *The Eternal Cripple*

MAN, at his best, remains a sort of one-lunged animal, never completely rounded and perfect, as a bacillus, say, is perfect. If he shows one valuable quality, it is almost unheard of for him to show any other. Give him a head, and he lacks a heart. Give him a heart of a gallon capacity, and his head holds scarcely a pint. The artist, nine times out of ten, avoids paying his debts, and is given to the debauching of virgins, so-called. The patriot is a bigot, and, more often than not, a cad and a coward. The man of physical courage is often on a level, intellectually, with a suburban clergyman. The intellectual giant has bad kidneys and cannot thread a needle. In all my years of search in this world, from the Golden Gate in the west to the Vistula in the east, and from the Orkney Islands in the north to the Spanish Main in the south, I have never met a thoroughly moral man who was honourable.

§ 2. *The Animal that Thinks*

That the great majority of human beings, even under our perfected Christian civilization, are still almost as incapable of rational thought as so many tabby cats – this is a fact to which we have all been made privy of late by the babbling of eminent psychologists. Granted. But let us not rashly assume that this infirmity is confined strictly to the nether herd – that, above the level where thinking may be said genuinely to begin, it goes on, level by level, to greater and greater heights of clarity and acumen.

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Nothing, indeed, of the sort. The curve goes upward for a while, but then it begins to flatten, and finally it dips very sharply. Thinking, indeed, is so recent an accomplishment phylogenetically that man is capable of it only in a narrow area, as he is capable of sight and hearing only in narrow areas. To one side lie the instinctive tropisms and intellectual peristaltic motions of the simple, rational only by a sort of pious licence; to the other side lie the more complex but even more nonsensical speculations of metaphysicians. The difference between the two is vastly less than is commonly assumed; we are all misled by the sombre, portentous manner of the metaphysicians. The truth is that between a speech by a Salvation Army convert and a philosophical treatise by a university neo-Platonist there is no more to choose than between the puling of an infant and the puling of a veteran of the Crimean War. Both show the human cerebrum loaded far beyond its Plimsoll mark; both, strictly speaking, are idiotic.

§ 3. *Veritas Odium Parit*

An old human delusion, largely fostered by theologians, is one to the effect that truth has a mysterious medicinal power – that its propagation makes the world better and man happier . . . *et cognoscetis veritatem, et veritas liberabit vos*. But is this so-called truth about truth true? It is not. The truth, nine times out of ten, is extremely disturbing and uncomfortable; if it is not grossly discreditable to someone it is apt to be painfully amazing to everyone. The masses of men are thus wise to hold it in suspicion, as they are wise to suspect that other delusion, liberty. Let us

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turn to an example. The most rational religious ideas held in modern times, at least among Christians, are probably those of the Unitarians; the most nonsensical are those of the Christian Scientists. Yet it must be obvious to every observer that the average Unitarian, even when he is quite healthy, which is not often, is a dour, conscience-stricken and unhappy fellow, whereas the average Christian Scientist, even when he is down with gall-stones, is full of a childish and enviable peace. The one is disquieted by his apprehension of the damning facts about God and the universe; the other is lulled by his magnificent imbecilities. I have had the honour of knowing, in my time, a number of eminent philosophers, some of them intelligent. The happiest among the latter, in his moments of greatest joy, used to entertain himself by drawing up wills leaving his body to anatomists.

§ 4. *Martyrs*

To die for an idea: it is unquestionably noble. But how much nobler it would be if men died for ideas that were true! Searching history, I can find no such case. All the great martyrs of the books died for sheer nonsense – often for trivial matters of doctrine and ceremonial, too absurd to be stated in plain terms. But what of the countless thousands who have perished in the wars, fighting magnificently for their country! Well, show me one who knew precisely what the war he died in was about, and could put it into a simple and plausible proposition.

§ 5. *The Goal*

The central aim of civilization, it must be plain, is simply to defy and correct the obvious intent of God, *e.g.*, that 5 per cent of the people of Christendom shall die of small-pox every year, that the issue of every love affair shall be a succession of little strangers, that cows shall devote themselves wholly to nursing their calves, that the wicked shall be miserable and the virtuous happy. Has civilization a motto? Then certainly it must be 'Not *Thy* will, O Lord, but *ours*, be done!'

§ 6. *The Reward*

The cadence at the end is always in the crystalline and sardonic key of C major. . . . The heroic sweatings and strivings of the Knights Templar, for a whole age the marvel of Christendom, are now embalmed in a single essay by James Anthony Froude, M.A., LL.D., an historian of charming style but dubious accuracy. If it were not for that single essay, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for an inquirer of English speech to find out what their finish was, and why they perished from the earth. Their old stronghold in London is now – what? A roost for lawyers, *i.e.*, for such fellows as they would have put to the sword at sight. And Palestine, for which they died by the thousand, is now given over to *Schnorrer* and *Meshulachim* from the Moscow ghetto and the Mile End Road.

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§ 7. *The Iconoclast*

Of a piece with the absurd pedagogical demand for so-called constructive criticism is the doctrine that an iconoclast is a hollow and evil fellow unless he can prove his case. Why, indeed, should he prove it? Doesn't he prove enough when he proves by his blasphemy that this or that idol is defectively convincing – that at least *one* visitor to the shrine is left full of doubts? The fact is enormously significant; it indicates that instinct has somehow risen superior to the shallowness of logic, the refuge of fools. The pedant and the priest have always been the most expert of logicians – and the most diligent disseminators of nonsense and worse. The liberation of the human mind has never been furthered by such learned dunderheads; it has been furthered by gay fellows who heaved dead cats into sanctuaries and then went roistering down the highways of the world, proving to all men that doubt, after all, was safe – that the god in the sanctuary was finite in his power, and hence a fraud. One horse-laugh is worth ten thousand syllogisms. It is not only more effective: it is also vastly more intelligent.

§ 8. *Duty*

Some of the loosest thinking in ethics has duty for its theme. Practically all writers on the subject agree that the individual owes certain unescapable duties to the race – for example, the duty of engaging in productive labour, and that of marrying and begetting offspring. In support of this position it is almost always argued that if *all* men

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neglected such duties the race would perish. The logic is hollow enough to be worthy of the pedants who are guilty of it. It simply confuses the conventionality, the pusillanimity, the lack of imagination of the majority of men with the duty of *all* men. There is not the slightest ground for assuming, even as a matter of mere argumentation, that *all* men will ever neglect these alleged duties. There will always remain a safe majority that is willing to do whatever is ordained – that accepts docilely the Government it is born under, obeys its laws, and supports its theory. But that majority does not comprise the men who render the highest and most intelligent services to the race; it comprises those who render nothing save their obedience.

For the man who differs from this inert and well-regimented mass, however slightly, there are no duties *per se*. What he is spontaneously inclined to do is of vastly more value to all of us than what the majority is willing to do. There is, indeed, no such thing as duty-in-itself; it is a mere chimera of ethical theorists. Human progress is furthered, not by conformity, but by aberration. The very concept of duty is thus a function of inferiority; it belongs naturally only to timorous and incompetent men. Even on such levels it remains largely a self-delusion, a soothing apparition, a euphemism for necessity. When a man succumbs to duty he merely succumbs to the habit and inclination of other men. Their collective interests invariably pull against his individual interests. Some of us can resist a pretty strong pull – the pull, perhaps, of thousands. But it is only the miraculous man who can withstand the pull of a whole nation.

§ 9. *To Him that Hath*

The most valuable of all human possessions, next to a superior and disdainful air, is the reputation of being of easy means. Nothing also so neatly eases one's way through life, especially in democratic countries. There is in 99 per cent of all democrats an irresistible impulse to crook the knee to wealth, to defer humbly to the power that goes with it, to see all sorts of high merits in the man who has it, or is said to have it. True enough, envy goes with the pliant neck, but it is envy somehow purged of all menace: the inferior man is afraid to do evil to the man with money in eight banks; he is even afraid to *think* evil of him — that is, in any patent and offensive way. Against capital as an abstraction he rants incessantly, and all of the laws that he favours treat it as if it were criminal. But in the presence of the concrete capitalist he is singularly fawning. What makes him so is easy to discern. He yearns with a great yearning for a chance to tap the capitalist's purse, and he knows very well, deep down in his heart, that he is too craven and stupid to do it by force of arms. So he turns to politeness, and tries to cajole. Give out the news that one has just made a killing on the Stock Exchange, or robbed some confiding widow of her dower, or swindled the Government in some patriotic enterprise, and at once one will discover that one's shabbiness is a charming eccentricity, and one's judgment of wines worth hearing, and one's politics worthy of attention and respect. The man who is thought to be poor never gets a fair chance. No one wants to listen to him. No

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one cares a damn what he thinks or knows or feels. No one has any active desire for his good opinion.

I discovered this principle early in life, and have put it to use ever since. I have got a great deal more out of men (and women) by having the name of being an opulent fellow than I have ever got by being decent to them, or by dazzling them with my sagacity, or by hard industry, or by a personal beauty that is singular and ineffable.

§ 10. *The Venerable Examined*

The older I grow the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom. It is my honest belief that I am no wiser to-day than I was five or ten years ago; in fact, I often suspect that I am appreciably *less* wise. Women can prevail over me to-day by devices that would have made me heave them out of my studio when I was thirty-five. I am also an easier mark for male swindlers than I used to be; at fifty I'll probably be joining clubs and reform societies and buying Mexican bonds. The truth is that every man goes up-hill in sagacity to a certain point, and then begins sliding down again. Nearly all the old fellows that I know are more or less balmy. Theoretically, they should be much wiser than younger men, if only because of their greater experience, but actually they seem to take on folly faster than they take on wisdom. A man of thirty-five or thirty-eight is almost woman-proof. For a woman to marry him is a Herculean feat. But by the time he is fifty he is quite as easy as the younger son of a marquis. On other planes the same decay of the intelligence is visible. Certainly

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it would be difficult to imagine any committee of relatively young men, of thirty or thirty-five, showing the unbroken childishness, ignorance and lack of humour of the Supreme Court of the United States. The average age of the learned justices must be well beyond sixty, and all of them are supposed to be of finished and mellowed sagacity. Yet their knowledge of the most ordinary principles of justice often turns out to be extremely meagre, and when they spread themselves grandly upon a great case their reasoning powers are usually found to be precisely equal to those of a respectable charwoman.

§ 11. *The Disabled Veteran*

The science of psychological pathology is still in its infancy. In all its literature in ten languages, I can't find a line about the permanent ill effects of acute emotional diseases – say, for example, love affairs. The common assumption of the world is that when a love affair is over it is over – that nothing remains behind. This is probably grossly untrue. It is my belief that every such experience leaves scars upon the psyche, and that they are quite as plain and quite as dangerous as the scars left on the neck by a carbuncle. A man who has passed through a love affair, even though he may eventually forget the lady's very name, is never quite the same thereafter. His scars may be small, but they are permanent. The sentimentalist, exposed incessantly, ends as a psychic cripple; he is as badly off as the man who has come home from the wars with shell-shock. The precise nature of the scars remains to be determined. My own

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notion is that they take the form of large yellow patches upon the self-esteem. Whenever a man thinks of one of his dead love affairs, and in particular whenever he allows his memory to dredge up an image of the woman he loved, he shivers like one taken in some unmanly and discreditable act. Such shivers, repeated often enough, must inevitably shake his inner integrity off its base. No man can love, and yet remain truly proud. It is a disarming and humiliating experience.

§ 12. *Definition*

Democracy is that system of government under which a great free people, having 35,717,342 native-born adult whites to choose from, including thousands who are handsome and many who are wise, pick out a Coolidge to be head of the State. It is as if a hungry man, set before a banquet prepared by master cooks and covering a table an acre in area, should turn his back upon the feast and stay his stomach by catching and eating flies.

§ 13. *Note in the Margin of a Treatise on Psychology*

As I stoop to lace my boot you hit me over the coccyx with a length of drain-pipe. I conclude instantly that you are an ass. This is a whole process of human thought in little. This also is free will.

§ 14. *Psychology at 5 a.m.*

It is in the throes of sober second thought, of the dreadful morning after, that men reveal their true souls. The Puritan always swears a bloody oath that he will never

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do it again. The civilized man simply resolves to be a bit more careful next time.

§ 15. *The Man of Honour*

The difference between a moral man and a man of honour is that the latter regrets a discreditable act, even when it has worked and he has not been caught.

CHAPTER III
THE HILLS OF ZION

IT was in the middle of a subtropical American summer when they tried the infidel Scopes at Dayton in Tennessee, but I went down there from New York very willingly, for I had good reports of the Tennessee bootleggers, and moreover I was eager to see something of evangelical Christianity, modern American model, as a going concern. In the big cities of the Republic, despite the endless efforts of consecrated men, it is laid up with a wasting disease. The very Sunday-school superintendents, taking jazz from the stealthy radio, shake their fire-proof legs; their pupils, moving into adolescence, no longer respond to the proliferating hormones by enlisting for missionary service in Africa, but resort to gin and fornication instead. I know of no congregation of true believers from Oregon to Maine that is not short of money; nor any pastor who is not sure that the Devil is making headway. Even in Dayton, though the mob was up to do execution upon Scopes, there was a strong smell of antinomianism. The nine chapels of the village were all half empty on Sunday, and weeds choked their yards. Only two or three of the resident ecclesiastics managed to sustain themselves by their ghostly science; the rest had to keep shops or work in the adjacent strawberry fields; one, I heard, was a barber. On the courthouse green a score of sweating theologians debated the darker passages of Holy Writ day and night, but I soon found that they were all unpaid volunteers, and that the local faithful, while interested in their exegesis as an

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intellectual exercise, did not permit it to impede the indigenous debaucheries. Exactly twelve minutes after I reached the village I was taken in tow by a Christian man and introduced to the favourite tippie of the Cumberland Range: half corn whisky and half coca-cola, the latter a non-alcoholic decoction that is popular all over the Southern States. The combination seemed a dreadful dose to me, spoiled as I was by the bootleg light wines and beers of the eastern seaboard, but I found that the Dayton illuminati got it down with gusto, rubbing their tummies and rolling their eyes. I include among them the chief local proponents of the Mosaic cosmogony. They were all hot for the literal authenticity of Genesis, but their faces were far too florid to belong to total abstainers, and when a pretty girl came tripping down the High Street, which was very often, they reached for the places where their cravats should have been with all the amorous enterprise of actors. It seemed somehow strange.

An amiable lady journalist of Chattanooga, familiar with those uplands, presently enlightened me. Dayton, she explained, was simply a great capital like any other great capital. That is to say, it was to Rhea county what New York was to the Republic or Paris to France. That is to say, it was predominantly epicurean and sinful. A country girl from some remote valley of the Cumberlands, coming into town, shivered on approaching Robinson's glittering chemist's shop and soda-water emporium, the centre of the town life, quite as a country girl from the upper reaches of New York State might shiver on approaching the Metropolitan Opera House or the Ritz Hotel. In every

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village lout she saw a potential white-slaver. The hard footpaths hurt her feet. Temptations of the flesh bristled to all sides of her, luring her to hell. This lady journalist told me of a session with just such a visitor, holden a few days before. The latter waited outside one of the town coca-cola shops while her husband negotiated with an ironmonger across the road. The lady journalist, idling along and observing that the stranger was badly used by the heat, invited her to step into the shop for a glass of coca-cola. The invitation brought forth only a gurgle of terror. Coca-cola, it quickly appeared, was prohibited by the country lady's pastor, as a levantine and hell-sent narcotic. He also prohibited coffee and tea – and apple-tarts! He had his doubts about white bread and butcher's meat. The lady journalist, interested, inquired about ice-cream. It was, she found, not specifically prohibited, but going into a coca-cola shop to get it would be clearly sinful. So she offered to get a dish of it, and bring it out. The visitor vacillated – and came near being lost. But God saved her in the nick of time. When the lady journalist emerged from the place she was in full flight up the High Street! Later on her husband, mounted on a mule, overtook her four miles out on the mountain highway.

This lady journalist, whose kindness covered city infidels as well as Alpine Christians, offered to take me back to the hills to a place where the old-time religion was genuinely on tap. The Scopes jury, she explained was composed mainly of its votaries, with a few Dayton intellectuals added to leaven the mass. It would thus be

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instructive to climb the heights and observe the former at their ceremonies. The trip, fortunately, might be made by motor-car. There was a road running out of Dayton to Morgantown, in the mountains to the westward, and thence beyond. But foreigners, it appeared, would have to approach the sacred grove cautiously, for the upland worshippers were very shy, and at the first sight of a strange face they would adjourn their orgy and slink into the forest. They were not to be feared, for God had long since forbidden them to practise assassination, or even assault, but if they were alarmed a rough trip would go for naught. So, after dreadful bumpings up a long and narrow road, we parked our car in a little wood-path a mile or two beyond the tiny village of Morgantown, and made the rest of the approach on foot, deployed like skirmishers. Far off in a dark, romantic glade a flickering light was visible, and out of the silence came the rumble of exhortation. We could distinguish the figure of the preacher only as a moving mote in the light: it was like looking down the tube of a dark-field microscope. Slowly and cautiously we crossed what seemed to be a pasture, and then we crouched down along the edge of a cornfield, and stealthily edged farther and farther. The light now grew larger and we could begin to make out what was going on. We went ahead on all fours, like snakes in the grass.

From the great limb of a mighty oak hung a couple of crude flambeaux. In the guttering glare was the preacher, and for a while we could see no one else. He was an immensely tall and thin mountaineer in blue homespun,

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his collarless shirt open at the neck and his hair a tousled mop. As he preached he paced up and down under the smoking flambeaux, and at each turn he thrust his arms into the air and yelled 'Glory to God!' We crept nearer in the shadow of the cornfield, and began to hear more of his discourse. He was preaching on the Day of Judgment. The High Kings of the earth, he roared, would all fall down and die; only the sanctified would stand up to receive the Lord God of Hosts. One of these Kings he mentioned by name, the King of what he called Greece-y. The King of Greece-y, he said, was doomed to hell. We crawled forward a few more yards and began to see the audience. It was seated on benches ranged round the preacher in a circle. Behind him sat a row of elders, men and women. In front were the younger folk. We crept on cautiously, and individuals rose out of the ghostly gloom. A young mother sat suckling her baby, rocking as the preacher paced up and down. Two scared little girls hugged each other, their pigtails down their backs. An immensely huge mountain woman, in a gingham dress, cut in one piece, rolled on her heels at every 'Glory to God!' To one side, and but half visible, was what appeared to be a bed. We found afterward that half a dozen babies were asleep upon it.

The preacher stopped at last, and there arose out of the darkness a woman with her hair pulled back into a tight little knot. She began so quietly that we couldn't hear what she said, but soon her voice rose resonantly and we could follow her. She was denouncing the reading of books. Some wandering pedlar, it appeared, had come to

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her mountain cabin and tried to sell her a specimen of his wares. She refused to touch it. Why, indeed, read a book? If what was in it was true, then everything in it was already in the Bible. If it was false, then reading it would imperil the soul. This syllogism from Caliph Omar complete, she sat down. There followed a hymn, led by a somewhat fat brother wearing silver-rimmed spectacles. It droned on for half a dozen stanzas, and then the first speaker resumed the floor. He argued that the gift of tongues was real and that education was a snare. Once his children could read the Bible, he said, they had enough. Beyond lay only infidelity and damnation. Sin stalked the cities. Dayton itself was a Sodom. Even Morgantown had begun to forget God. He sat down, and a female aurochs in gingham got up. She began quietly, but was soon leaping and roaring, and it was hard to follow her. Under cover of the turmoil, we sneaked a bit closer.

A couple of other discourses followed, and there were two or three hymns. Suddenly a change of mood began to make itself felt. The last hymn ran longer than the others, and dropped gradually into a monotonous, unintelligible chant. The leader beat time with his book. The faithful broke out with exultations. When the singing ended there was a brief palaver that we could not hear, and two of the men moved a bench into the circle of light directly under the flambeaux. Then a half-grown girl emerged from the darkness and threw herself upon it. We noticed with astonishment that she had bobbed hair. 'This sister,' said the leader, 'has asked

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for prayers.' We moved a bit closer. We could now see faces plainly, and hear every word. What followed quickly reached such heights of barbaric grotesquerie that it was hard to believe it real. At a signal all the faithful crowded up to the bench and began to pray – not in unison, but each for himself! At another they all fell on their knees, their arms over the penitent. The leader kneeled facing us, his head alternately thrown back dramatically or buried in his hands. Words spouted from his lips like bullets from a machine-gun – appeals to God to pull the penitent back out of hell, defiances of the demons of the air, a vast impassioned jargon of apocalyptic texts. Suddenly he rose to his feet, threw back his head and began to speak in the tongues – blub-blub-blub, gurgle-gurgle-gurgle. His voice rose to a higher register. The climax was a shrill, inarticulate squawk, like that of a man throttled. He fell headlong across the pyramid of supplicants.

A comic scene? Somehow, no. The poor half-wits were too horribly in earnest. It was like peeping through a knot-hole at the writhings of people in pain. From the squirming and jabbering mass a young woman gradually detached herself – a woman not uncomely, with a pathetic home-made cap on her head. Her head jerked back, the veins of her neck swelled, and her fists went to her throat as if she were fighting for breath. She bent backward until she was like half a hoop. Then she suddenly snapped forward. We caught a flash of the whites of her eyes. Presently her whole body began to be convulsed – great throes that began at the shoulders and ended at the hips.

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She would leap to her feet, thrust her arms in air, and then hurl herself upon the heap. Her praying flattened out into a mere delirious caterwauling. I describe the thing discreetly, and as a strict Behaviourist. The lady's subjective sensations I leave to infidel pathologists, privy to the works of Ellis, Freud, and Moll. Whatever they were, they were obviously not painful, for they were accompanied by vast heavings and gurglings of a joyful and even ecstatic nature. And they seemed to be contagious, too, for soon a second penitent, also female, joined the first, and then came a third, and a fourth, and a fifth. The last one had an extraordinarily violent attack. She began with mild enough jerks of the head, but in a moment she was bounding all over the place, like a chicken with its head cut off. Every time her head came up a stream of hosannas would issue out of it. Once she collided with a dark, undersized brother, hitherto silent and stolid. Contact with her set him off as if he had been kicked by a horse. He leaped into the air, threw back his head, and began to gurgle as if with a mouthful of bird-shot. Then he loosed one tremendous, stentorian sentence in the tongues, and collapsed.

By this time the performers were quite oblivious to the profane universe, and so it was safe to go still closer. We left our hiding and came up to the little circle of light. We slipped into the vacant seats on one of the rickety benches. The heap of mourners was directly before us. They bounced into us as they cavorted. The smell that they radiated, sweating there in that obscene heap, half

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suffocated us. Not all of them, of course, did the thing in the grand manner. Some merely moaned and rolled their eyes. The female ox in gingham flung her great bulk on the ground and jabbered an unintelligible prayer. One of the men, in the intervals between fits, put on his spectacles and read his Bible. Beside me on the bench sat the young mother and her baby. She suckled it through the whole orgy, obviously fascinated by what was going on, but never venturing to take any hand in it. On the bed just outside the light half a dozen other babies slept peacefully. In the shadows, suddenly appearing and as suddenly going away, were vague figures, whether of believers or of scoffers I do not know. They seemed to come and go in couples. Now and then a couple at the ring-side would step out and vanish into the black night. After a while some came back, the males looking somewhat sheepish. There was whispering outside the circle of vision. A couple of Fords lurched up the road, cutting holes in the darkness with their lights. Once someone out of sight loosed a bray of laughter.

All this went on for an hour or so. The original penitent, by this time, was buried three deep beneath the heap. One caught a glimpse, now and then, of her yellow bobbed hair, but then she would vanish again. How she breathed down there I don't know; it was hard enough six feet away, with a strong pipe to help. When the praying brothers would rise up for a bout with the tongues their faces were streaming with perspiration. The fat harridan in gingham sweated like a navvy. Her hair got loose and fell down over her face. She fanned

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herself with her skirt. A powerful old girl she was, plainly equal in her day to a bout with obstetrics and a week's washing on the same morning, but this was worse than a week's washing. Finally, she fell into a heap, breathing in great, convulsive gasps.

Finally, we got tired of the show and returned to Dayton. It was nearly eleven o'clock—an immensely late hour for those latitudes—but the whole town was still gathered in the court-house yard, listening to the disputes of theologians. The Scopes trial had brought them in from all directions. There was a friar wearing a sign announcing that he was 'the Bible champion of the world.' There was a Seventh Day Adventist arguing that Clarence Darrow, Mr. Scopes' senior counsel, was the beast with seven heads and ten horns described in Revelation xiii., and that the end of the world was at hand. There was an evangelist with the news that atheists in Cincinnati, far to the northward, were preparing to descend upon Dayton, hang the eminent Judge Raulston, and burn the town. There was an ancient who maintained that no Catholic could be a Christian. There was the eloquent Pastor T. T. Martin, of Blue Mountain, Miss., come to town with a truck-load of torches and hymn-books to put Darwin in its place. There was a singing brother bellowing apocalyptic hymns. There was William Jennings Bryan, followed everywhere by a gaping crowd. Dayton was having a roaring time. It was better than the circus. But the note of devotion was simply not there; the Daytonians, after listening a while, would slip away to Robinson's shop to

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regale themselves with coca-cola, or to the Aqua Hotel, where the learned Raulston sat in state, judicially picking his teeth. The real religion was not present. It began at the bridge over the town creek, where the road makes off for the hills.

CHAPTER IV
THE OLD SUBJECT

§ 1. *Free and Foolish*

IT is the economic emancipation of woman, I suppose, that must be blamed for the present wholesale discussion of the sex question, so offensive to the romantic. Eminent authorities have full often described, and with the utmost heat and eloquence, her state before she was delivered from her fetters. Almost her only feasible trade, in those dark and Christian days, was that of wife. True enough, she might also become a servant, or go to work in a factory, or offer herself upon the streets, but all of those vocations were so revolting that no rational woman followed them if she could help it: she would leave any one of them at a moment's notice at the call of a man, for the call of a man meant promotion for her, economically and socially. The males of the time, knowing what a boon they had to proffer, drove hard bargains. They demanded a long list of high qualities in the women they summoned to their seraglios, but most of all they demanded what they called virtue. It was not sufficient that a candidate should be anatomically intact: she must also be pure in mind. There was, of course, but one way to keep her so pure, and that was by building a high wall around her mind, and hitting her with a club every time she ventured to peer over it. It was as dangerous, in that era, for a woman to show any interest in or knowledge of the great physiological farce of sex as it would be to-day for a bishop to reveal himself in his cups in the House of Lords. Everyone knew, to be sure, that as a mammal

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she had sex, and that as a potential wife and mother she probably had some secret interest in its phenomena, but it was felt, perhaps wisely, that even the most academic theorizing had within it the deadly germs of the experimental method, and so she was forbidden to think about the matter at all, and whatever information she acquired at all she had to acquire by a method of bootlegging.

The generation still on its legs in Europe and America has seen the almost total collapse of that naïve and constabulary system, and of the economic structure supporting it. Beginning with the 'eighties of the last century, there rose up a harem rebellion which quickly knocked both to pieces. The women of the Western World not only began to plunge heroically into all of the old professions, hitherto sacred to men: they also began to invent a lot of new professions, many of them unimagined by men. Worse, they began to succeed in them. The working woman of the old days worked only until she could snare a man; any man was better than her work. But the working woman of the new days was under no such pressure; her work made her a living and sometimes more than a living; when a man appeared in her net she took two looks at him, one of them usually very searching, before landing him. The result was an enormous augmentation of her feeling of self-sufficiency, her spirit of independence, her natural inclination to get two sides into the bargaining. The result, secondarily, was a revolt against all the old taboos that had surrounded her, all the childish incapacities and ignorances that had been forced upon her. The result, tertiary, was a vast running amok

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in the field that, above all others, had been forbidden to her: that of sexual knowledge and experiment.

We now suffer from the effects of that running amok. It is women, not men, who are doing all the current gabbling about sex, and proposing all the new-fangled modifications of the rules and regulations ordained by God, and they are hard at it very largely, I suppose, because being at it at all is a privilege that is still new to them. The whole order of human females, in other words, is passing through a sort of intellectual adolescence, and it is disturbed as greatly as biological adolescents are by the spouting of the hormones. The attitude of men toward the sex question, it seems to me, has not changed greatly in my time. Barring a few earnest men whose mental processes, here as elsewhere, are essentially womanish, they still view it somewhat jocosely. Taking one with another, they believe that they know all about it that is worth knowing, and so it does not challenge their curiosity, and they do not put in much time discussing it, save mockingly. But among the women, if a bachelor may presume to judge, interest in it is intense. They want to know all that is known about it, all that has been guessed and theorized about it; they bristle with ideas of their own about it. It is hard to find a reflective woman, in these days, who is not harbouring some new and startling scheme for curing the evils of monogamous marriage; it is impossible to find any woman who has not given ear to such schemes. Women, not men, read the endless books upon the subject that now rise mountain-high in all the book-shops, and women, not men,

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discuss and re-discuss the notions in them. An acquaintance of mine, a distinguished American critic, owns a copy of one of the most revolutionary of these books, by title *The Art of Love*, that was suppressed on the day of its publication by the New York Comstocks. He tells me that he has already lent it to twenty-six women, and that he has more than fifty applications for it on file. Yet he has never read it himself!

As a professional fanatic for free thought and free speech, I can only view all this uproar in the *Frauenzimmer* with high satisfaction. It gives me delight to see a taboo violated, and that delight is doubled when the taboo is one that is senseless. Sex is more important to women than to men, and so they ought to be free to discuss it as they please, and to hatch and propagate whatever ideas about it occur to them. Moreover, I can see nothing but nonsense in the doctrine that their concern with such matters damages their charm. So far as I am concerned, a woman who knows precisely what a Graafian follicle is is just as charming as one who doesn't — just as charming, and far less dangerous. Charm in women, indeed, is a variable star, and shows different colours at different times. When their chief mark was ignorance, then the most ignorant was the most charming; now that they begin to think deeply and indignantly there is charm in their singular astuteness. But I am inclined to believe that they have not yet attained to a genuine astuteness in the new field of sex. To the contrary, it seems to me that a fundamental error contaminates their whole dealing with the subject, and that is

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the error of assuming that sexual questions, whether social, physiological, or pathological, are of vast and even paramount importance to mankind in general – in brief, that sex is really a first-rate matter.

I doubt it. I believe that in this department men show better judgment than women, if only because their information is older and their experience wider. Their tendency is to dismiss the whole thing lightly, to reduce sex to the lowly estate of an afterthought and a recreation, and under that tendency there is a sound instinct. I do not believe that the lives of normal men are much coloured or conditioned, either directly or indirectly, by purely sexual considerations. I believe that nine-tenths of them would carry on all the activities which engage them now, and with precisely the same humourless diligence, if there were not a woman in the world. The notion that man would not work if he lacked an audience, and that the audience must be a woman, seems to me to be a hollow sentimentality. Men work because they want to eat, because they want to feel secure, because they long to overcome and enslave their fellows. A man may crave his wife's approbation, or some other woman's approbation, of his social graces, of his taste, of his generosity and courage, of his general dignity in the world, but long before he ever gives thought to such things, and long after he has forgotten them, he craves the approbation and envy of his fellow-men. Above all, he craves the approbation and envy of his fellow-craftsmen – the men who understand exactly what he is trying to do, and are expertly competent to judge his doing of it. Can you

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imagine a surgeon putting the good opinion of his wife above the good opinion of other surgeons? If you can, then you can do something that I cannot.

Here, of course, I do not argue absurdly that the good opinion of his wife is nothing to him. Obviously, it is a lot, for if it does not constitute the principal reward of his work, then it at least constitutes the principal joy of his hours of ease, when his work is done. He wants his wife to respect and admire him; to be able to make her do it is also a talent. But if he is intelligent he must discover very early that her respect and admiration do not necessarily run in direct ratio to his intrinsic worth, that the qualities and acts that please her are not always the qualities and acts that are most satisfactory to the censor within him—in brief, that the relation between man and woman, however intimate it may seem, must always remain a bit casual and superficial—that sex, at bottom, belongs to comedy and the cool of the evening, and not to the sober business that goes on in the heat of the day. That sober business, as I have said, would still go on if woman were abolished and heirs and assigns were manufactured in laboratories. Men would not only work as hard as they do to-day; they would also get almost as much satisfaction out of their work. For all of the men that I know on this earth, ranging from poets to ambassadors and from bishops to statisticians, I know none who labours primarily because he wants to please a woman. They are all hard at it because they want to impress other men and so please themselves.

Women, plainly enough, are in a far different case.

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Their emancipation has not yet gone to the length of making them genuinely free. They have rid themselves, very largely, of the absolute *need* to please men, but they have not yet rid themselves of the *impulse* to please men. Perhaps they never will: one might easily devise a plausible argument to that effect on biological grounds. But sufficient unto the day is the phenomenon before us: they have got rid of the old taboo which forbade them to think and talk about sex, and they still labour under the old superstition that sex is a matter of paramount importance. The result, in my judgment, is an absurd emission of piffle. In every division there is vast and often ludicrous exaggeration. The campaign for birth control takes on the colossal proportions of the war to end war. The venereal diseases are represented to be as widespread, at least in men, as colds in the head, and as lethal as apoplexy or cancer. Great hordes of viragoes patrol the world, instructing flappers in the mechanics of birth control and their mothers in obstetrics. The light-hearted monogamy which produced all of us is denounced as an infamy comparable to cannibalism. Over all sounds the battle-cry of quacks and zealots at all times and everywhere: *Veritas liberabit vos!*

The truth? How much of this new gospel is actually truth? Perhaps two per cent. The rest is idle theorizing, doctrinaire nonsense, mere scandalous rubbish. All that is worth knowing about sex – all, that is, that is solidly established and of sound utility – can be taught to any intelligent boy of sixteen in two hours. Is it taught in the current books, so enormously circulated? I doubt it.

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Even the most serious and honest of these volumes are probably futile, for they are all founded upon a pedagogical error. That is to say, they are all founded upon an attempt to explain a romantic mystery in terms of an exact science. Nothing could be more absurd: as well attempt to interpret Beethoven in terms of mathematical physics – as many a fatuous contrapuntist, indeed, has tried to do. The mystery of sex presents itself to the young, not as a scientific problem to be solved, but as a romantic emotion to be accounted for. The only result of the current endeavour to explain its phenomena by seeking parallels in botany is to make botany obscene.

But perhaps the worst thing that the new gospel has accomplished is the thing mourned by Agnes Repplier in *The Repeal of Reticence*. Innocence has been killed, and romance has been sadly wounded by the same discharge of smutty artillery. The flapper is no longer naïve and charming; she goes to the altar of God with a learned and even cynical glitter in her eye. The veriest school-girl of to-day, fed upon Forel, Marie Stopes and the Freud books, knows as much as the midwife of 1885, and spends a good deal more time discharging and disseminating her information. All this, of course, is highly embarrassing to the more romantic and ingenuous sort of men, of whom I have the honour to be one. We are constantly in the position of General Mitchener in Shaw's *Press Cuttings* when he begs Mrs. Farrell, the talkative charwoman, to reserve her confidences for her medical adviser. One often wonders, indeed, what women now talk of to doctors.

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Moreover, all this new-fangled 'frankness' tends to dam up, at least for civilized adults, one of the principal well-springs of art, to wit, impropriety. What is neither hidden nor forbidden is seldom very charming. If women, continuing their present tendency to its logical goal, end by going stark naked, there will be no more poets and painters, but only dermatologists and anthropologists.

§ 2. *Sex on the Stage*

The effort to convert the theatre into a forum of solemn sex discussion is another abhorrent by-product of the current over-emphasis of the reproductive faculty. Fortunately, it seems to be failing. A few years ago, people went to see Brieux's *Les Avariés*, but to-day it is forgotten, and its successors are all obscure. The movement originated in Germany with the production of Frank Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen*. The Germans gaped and twisted in their seats for a season or two, and then abandoned sex as a horror and went back to sex as a comedy. This last, as I have said, is what it actually is and should be, especially in the theatre. The theatre is no place for painful speculation; it is a place for diverting representation. Its best and truest sex plays are not such shockers as *Le Mariage d'Olympe* and *Damaged Goods*, but such penetrating and excellent comedies as *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. In *Much Ado* we have an accurate and unforgettable picture of the way in which the normal male of the human species is brought to the altar — that is, by the way of appealing to his hollow vanity, the way of capitalizing his native and ineradic-

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able asininity. And in *The Taming of the Shrew* we have a picture of the way in which the average woman, having so snared him, is purged of her resultant vainglory and bombast, and thus reduced to decent discipline and decorum, that the marriage may go on in solid tranquillity.

The whole drama of sex, in real life, as well as on the stage, revolves around these two enterprises. One half of it consists of pitting the native intelligence of women against the native sentimentality of men, and the other half consists of bringing women into a reasonable order, that their superiority may not be too horribly obvious. To the first division belong the dramas of courtship, and a good many of those of marital conflict. In each case the essential drama is not a tragedy, but a comedy – nay, a farce. In each case the conflict is not between imperishable verities, but between mere vanities and pretensions. This is the essence of the comic: the unmasking of fraud, its destruction by worse fraud. Marriage, as we know it in Christendom, though its utility is obvious and its necessity is at least arguable, is just such a series of frauds. It begins with the fraud that the impulse to it is lofty, unearthly and disinterested. It proceeds to the fraud that both parties are equally eager for it and equally benefited by it – which actually happens only when two Mondays come together. And it rests thereafter upon the fraud that what is once agreeable (or tolerable) remains agreeable ever thereafter – that I shall be exactly the same man in 1938 that I am to-day, and that my wife, if I acquire one, will be the same woman, and intrigued by

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the merits of the same man. This last assumption is so outrageous that, on purely evidential and logical grounds, not even the most sentimental person would support it. It thus becomes necessary to reinforce it by attaching to it the concept of honour. That is to say, it is held up, not on the ground that it is actually true, but on the ground that a recognition of its truth is part of the bargain made at the altar, and that a repudiation of this bargain would be dishonourable. Here we have honour, which is based upon a sense of the deepest and most inviolable truth, brought in to support something admittedly not true. Here, in other words, we have a situation in comedy, almost exactly parallel to that in which a coloured pastor in Alabama whoops 'Onward, Christian soldiers!' like a calliope in order to drown out the crowing of the stolen cock beneath his chasuble.

In all plays of the sort that are regarded as 'strong' and 'significant' by the more advanced critics, connubial infidelity is the chief theme. Smith, having a wife, Mrs. Smith, betrays her love and trust by running off with Miss Simpson, his secretary. Or Mrs. Brown, detecting her husband, Mr. Brown, in lamentable proceedings with a neighbour, a *divorcée*, forgives him and continues to be true to him in consideration of her children, Fred, Pansy, and little Fern. Both situations produce a great deal of eye-rolling and snuffling among the softies aforesaid. Yet neither contains the slightest touch of tragedy, and neither at bottom is even honest. Both, on the contrary, are based upon an assumption that is unsound and ridiculous – the assumption, to wit, that the position of

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the injured wife is grounded upon the highest idealism – that the injury she suffers is directed at her lofty and impeccable spirit – that it leaves her standing in an heroic attitude. All this, soberly examined, is found to be untrue. The fact is that her moving impulse is simply a desire to cut a good figure before her world – in brief, that plain vanity is what animates her.

This public expectation that she will endure and renounce is itself hollow and sentimental, and so much so that it can seldom stand much strain. If, for example, her heroism goes beyond a certain modest point – if she carries it to the extent of complete abnegation and self-sacrifice – her reward is not that she is thought heroic, but that she is thought weak and foolish. And if, by any chance, the external pressure upon her is removed and she is left to go on with her alleged idealism alone – if, say, her recreant husband dies and some new suitor enters to dispute the theory of her deathless fidelity – then it is regarded as downright insane for her to continue playing her artificial part.

In frank comedy we see the situation more accurately dealt with, and hence more honestly and more instructively. Instead of depicting one party as revolting against the assumption of eternal fidelity melodramatically and the other as facing the revolt heroically and tragically, we have both criticizing it by a good-humoured flouting of it – not necessarily by act, but by attitude. This attitude is normal and sensible. It rests upon genuine human traits and tendencies. It is sound, natural, and honest. It gives the comedy of the stage a high validity

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that the bombastic fustian of the stage can never show, all the critics to the contrary notwithstanding.

When I speak of infidelity, of course, I do not mean only the gross infidelity of 'strong' sex plays and the divorce courts, but that lighter infidelity which relieves and makes bearable the burdens of theoretical fidelity – in brief, the natural reaction of human nature against an artificial and preposterous assumption. The assumption is that a sexual choice, once made, is irrevocable – more, that all desire to revoke it, even transiently, disappears. The fact is that no human choice can ever be of that irrevocable character, and that the very existence of such an assumption is a constant provocation to challenge it and rebel against it.

What we have in marriage actually – or in any other such contract – is a constant war between the impulse to give that rebellion objective reality and a social pressure which puts a premium on submission. The rebel, if he strikes out, at once collides with a solid wall, the bricks of which are made up of the social assumption of his docility, and the mortar of which is the frozen sentimentality of his own lost yesterday – his fatuous assumption that what was once agreeable to him would be always agreeable to him. Here we have the very essence of comedy – a situation almost exactly parallel to that of the pompous old gentleman who kicks a hat lying in the footway and stumps his toe against the half-brick within.

Under the whole of the conventional assumption reposes an assumption even more foolish, to wit, that

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sexual choice is regulated by some transcendental process, that a mysterious accuracy gets into it, that it is limited by impenetrable powers, that there is for every man one certain woman. This sentimentality not only underlies the theory of marriage, but is also the chief apology for divorce. Nothing could be more ridiculous. The truth is that marriages in Christendom are determined, not by elective affinities, but by the most trivial accidents, and that the issue of those accidents is relatively unimportant. That is to say, a normal man could be happy with any one of at least two dozen women of his acquaintance, and a man specially fitted to accept the false assumptions of marriage could be happy with almost any presentable woman of his race, class, and age. He is married to Marie instead of to Gladys because Marie definitely decided to marry him, whereas Gladys vacillated between him and some other. And Marie decided to marry him instead of some other, not because the impulse was irresistibly stronger, but simply because the thing seemed more feasible. In such choices, at least among women, there is often not even any self-delusion. They see the facts clearly, and even if, later on, they are swathed in sentimental trappings, the revelation is not entirely obliterated.

Here we have comedy double distilled — a combat of pretensions that, on the one side, perhaps, have risen to self-hallucination, but on the other side are more or less uneasily conscious and deliberate. This is the true soul of high farce. This is something not to snuffle over, but to roar at.

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§ 3. *The Man and his Shadow*

Every man, whatever his actual qualities, is credited with and judged by certain general qualities that are supposed to appertain to his sex, particularly by women. Thus man the individual is related to Man the species, often to his damage and dismay. Consider my own case. I am by nature one of the most orderly of mortals. I have a place for every article of my personal property, whether a Bible or a cocktail-shaker, a dagger or an eye-dropper, and I always keep it where it belongs. I never upset a waste-paper basket. I am never late for trains. I never run short of collars. I never go out with a purple cravat on a blue shirt. I never fail to appear in time for dinner without telephoning or telegraphing. Yet the women who are cursed by God with the care of me maintain and cherish the fiction that I am an extremely careless and even hoggish fellow – that I have to be elaborately nursed, supervised and policed – that the slightest relaxation of vigilance over my everyday conduct would reduce me to a state of helplessness and chaos, with all my clothes mislaid, half my books in the dust-bin, my letters unanswered, my face unshaven, and my work-room not unlike a Socialist meeting-place after a raid by the Fascisti. It is their firm theory that, unaided by superior suggestion, I'd wear one shirt six weeks, and boat-ing flannels until Christmas. They never speak of my work-room save in terms of horror, though it is actually the most orderly room in my house. Weekly I am accused of having lost all my handkerchiefs, though they are

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in their lawful place all the while. At least once a month formal plans are discussed for reorganizing my whole mode of life, that I may not sink into irremediable carelessness, inefficiency and barbarism.

I note that many other men lie under the same benign espionage and misrepresentation – in fact, nearly all men. But it is my firm belief that very few men are really disorderly. The business of the world is managed by getting order into it, and the feeling for discipline thus engendered is carried over into domestic life. I know of very few men who ever drop ashes on the dining-room rug, or store their collars in their cigar-box, or put on brown socks with their dress-clothes, or forget to turn off the water after they have bathed, or neglect to keep dinner engagements – and most of these few, I am firmly convinced, do it because their women-folk expect it of them, because it would cause astonishment and dismay if they refrained. I myself, more than once, have deliberately hung my hat on a chandelier, or clomped over the parquetry with muddy boots, or gone out in a snowstorm without a great-coat, or come down to dinner in a ragged collar, or filled my shirt-box with old copies of the *Church Times*, or upset a bottle of green ink, or used tooth-paste for shaving, or gone without having my hair trimmed for three or four weeks, in order to give a certain necessary colour to the superstition of my oafishness. If I failed to do such things now and then I'd become unpopular, and very justly so, for nothing is more obnoxious than a human being who is always challenging and correcting the prevailing view of him. Even now I

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make no protest; I merely record the fact. On my death-bed, I dare say, I shall carry on the masquerade. That is to say, I shall swallow a clinical thermometer or two, upset my medicines over my counterpane, keep a set of dice under my pillow, and maybe, at the end, fall clumsily out of bed.

§ 4. *The Survivor*

Around every bachelor of more than thirty-five legends tend to congregate, chiefly about the causes of his celibacy. If it is not whispered that he is damaged goods, and hence debarred from marriage by a lofty concept of service to the unborn, it is told under the breath that he was insanely in love at the age of twenty-six with a beautiful creature who jilted him for a stockbroker, and so broke his heart beyond repair. Such tales are nearly always moonshine. The reason why the average bachelor of thirty-five remains a bachelor is really very simple. It is, in brief, that no ordinarily attractive and intelligent woman has ever made a serious and undivided effort to marry him.

§ 5. *The Mime*

The fundamental objection to actors, stripping the business of all mere sophistry and snobbery, is that they give away the idiotic vanity of the whole male sex. An actor is simply a man who, by word and strut, says aloud of *himself* what all normal men think of *themselves*. Thus he exposes, in a highly indiscreet and disconcerting manner, the full force of masculine vanity. But I doubt that he exaggerates it. No healthy male is ever actually

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modest. No healthy male ever really thinks or talks of anything save himself. His conversation is one endless boast — often covert, but always undiluted. His politics is a mere sneering at what he conceives to be inferiors; his philosophy is simply an exposure of asses; he cannot imagine himself save as superior, dominating, the centre of situations. Even his theology is seldom more than a stealthy comparison of himself and God, to the disadvantage of God. . . . The youngest flapper knows all this. Feminine strategy, in the duel of sex, consists almost wholly of an adroit feeding of this vanity. Man makes love by braggadocio. Woman makes love by listening. . . . Once a woman passes a certain point in intelligence she finds it almost impossible to get a husband: she simply cannot go on listening without laughing.

§ 6. *Footnote for Suffragettes*

The double standard of morality will survive in this world so long as a woman whose husband has been debauched is favoured with the sympathetic tears of other women, and a man whose wife has run away with a pretty fellow is laughed at by other men.

CHAPTER V
WOMEN AS NOVELISTS

AN unmistakable flavour of effeminacy hangs about the novel, however heroic its content. Even in the gaudy tales of a James Oliver Curwood, with their bold projections of the Freudian dreams of suburban rectors, city clerks, schoolmasters and other such timorous carnivora, there is a subtle something that suggests water-colour painting, lip-sticks and bon-bons. Well, why not? When the novel, in form that we know to-day, arose in Spain toward the end of the sixteenth century, it was aimed very frankly at the emerging women of the Castilian seraglios – women who were gradually emancipating themselves from the *Küche-Kinder-Kirche* darkness of the later Middle Ages, but had not yet come to anything even remotely approaching the worldly experience and intellectual curiosity of men. They could now read and they liked to practise the art, but the grand literature of the time was too profound for them, and too sombre. So literary confectioners undertook stuff that would be more to their taste, and the modern novel was born. A single plot served most of these confectioners; it became and remains one of the conventions of the form. Man and maid meet, love, and proceed to kiss – but the rest must wait. They remain chaste through long and harrowing chapters; not until the very last scene do fate and Holy Church license anything more. This plot, as I say, still serves, and Arnold Bennett is authority for the doctrine that it is the safest known. Its appeal is patently to the feminine fancy, not to the masculine.

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Women like to be wooed endlessly before they loose their girdles and are wooed no more. But a man, when he finds a damsel to his taste, is eager to get through the preliminary hocus-pocus as soon as possible.

That women are still the chief readers of novels is known to every book-shop assistant; Joseph Hergesheimer, the American, a little while back was bemoaning the fact as a curse to his craft. What is less often noted is that women themselves, as they have gradually become fully literate, have forced their way to the front as makers of the stuff they feed on, and that they show signs of ousting the men, soon or late, from the business. Save in the department of lyrical verse, which demands no organization of ideas but only fluency of feeling, they have nowhere else done serious work in literature. There is no epic poem of any solid value by a woman, dead or alive; and no drama, whether comedy or tragedy; and no work of metaphysical speculation; and no history; and no basic document in any other realm of thought. In criticism, whether of works of art or of the ideas underlying them, few women have ever got beyond the *Schwärmerei* of Madame de Staël's *L'Allemagne*. In the essay, the most competent woman barely surpasses the average Fleet Street *causerie* hack. But in the novel the ladies have stood on a level with even the most accomplished men since the day of Jane Austen, and not only in Anglo-Saxondom, but also everywhere else, save perhaps in Russia. To-day it would be difficult to think of a contemporary German novelist, forgetting Thomas Mann, of unquestionably sounder dignity than Clara

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Viebig, Helene Böhlau or Ricarda Huch, or a Scandinavian novelist clearly above the late Selma Lagerlöf, or an Italian above Mathilda Serao, or, for that matter, more than two or three living Englishmen above May Sinclair, or more than two Americans equal to Willa Cather. Not only are women writing novels quite as good as those written by men: they are actually surpassing men in their experimental development of the novel form. When men exhibit any discontent with the conventional artificialities of that form it usually takes the shape of a vain and uncouth revolt against the whole inner spirit of the novel – that is, against the characteristics which made it what it is. Their lush imagination tempts them to try to convert it into something that it isn't – for example, an epic, a political document, or a philosophical work. This fact explains, in one direction, such dialectical parables as Dreiser's *The Genius*, H. G. Wells' *Joan and Peter*, and Upton Sinclair's *King Coal*, and, in a quite different direction, such rhapsodies as Cabell's *Furgen*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Jacob Wassermann's *The World's Illusion*. These things are novels only in the very limited sense that Beethoven's *Vittoria* and Goldmarck's *Ländliche Hochzeit* are symphonies. Their chief purpose is not that of prose fiction; it is either that of argumentation or that of poetry. The women novelists, with very few exceptions, are far more careful to remain within the legitimate bounds of the form; they do not often abandon representation to exhort or exult. Mrs. Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* shows a great deal of originality in its method; the story it tells is cer-

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tainly not a conventional one, nor is it told in a conventional way. But it remains a novel none the less, and as clearly so, in fact, as *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* or *Robinson Crusoe*.

Much exertion of the laryngeal and respiratory muscles is wasted upon a discussion of the differences between realistic novels and romantic novels. As a matter of fact, every authentic novel is realistic in its method, however fantastic it may be in its fable. The primary aim of the novel, at all times and everywhere, is the representation of human beings at their follies and villainies, and no other art form clings to that aim so faithfully. It sets forth, not what might be true, or what ought to be true, but what actually *is* true. This is obviously not the case with poetry. Poetry is the product of an effort to invent a world appreciably better than the one we live in; its essence is not the representation of the facts, but the deliberate concealment and denial of the facts. As for the drama, it vacillates, and if it touches the novel on one side it also touches the epic on the other. But the novel is concerned solely with human nature as it is practically revealed and with human experience as men actually know it. If it departs from that representational fidelity ever so slightly, it becomes to that extent a bad novel; if it departs violently it ceases to be a novel at all. James Branch Cabell, the author of *Jurgen*, who shows all the usual critical deficiencies of an imaginative artist, is one who has spent a good deal of time questioning the uses of realism. Yet it is a plain fact that his own stature as an artist depends almost wholly upon his capacity for

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accurate observation and realistic representation. The stories in *The Line of Love*, though they may appear superficially to be excessively romantic, really owe all of their charm to their pungent realism. The pleasure they give is the pleasure of recognition; one somehow delights in seeing a mediæval baron acting precisely like a modern stockbroker. As for *Jurgen*, it is as realistic in manner as Zola's *La Terre*, despite its grotesque fable and its burden of political, theological and epistemological ideas. No one not an idiot would mistake the dialogue between Jurgen and Queen Guinevere's father for romantic, in the sense that Kipling's *Mandalay* is romantic; it is actually as mordantly realistic as the dialogue between Nora and Helmer in the last act of *A Doll's House*.

It is my contention that women succeed in the novel – and that they will succeed even more strikingly as they gradually throw off the inhibitions that have hitherto cobwebbed their minds – simply because they are better fitted for this realistic representation than men – because they see the facts of life more sharply, and are less distracted by moony dreams. Women seldom have the pathological faculty vaguely called imagination. One doesn't often hear of them groaning over colossal bones in their sleep, as dogs do, or constructing heavenly hierarchies or political utopias, as men do. Their concern is always with things of more objective substance – roofs, meals, rent, clothes, the birth and upbringing of children. They are, I believe, generally happier than men, if only because the demands they make of life are more moderate and less romantic. The chief pain that a man normally

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suffers in his progress through this vale is that of disillusionment; the chief pain that the normal woman suffers is that of parturition. There is enormous significance in the difference. The first is artificial and self-inflicted; the second is natural and unescapable. The psychological history of the differentiation I need not go into here: its springs lie obvious in the greater physical strength of man and his freedom from child-bearing, and in the larger mobility and capacity for adventure that go therewith. A man dreams of utopias simply because he feels himself free to construct them; a woman must keep house. In late years, to be sure, she has toyed with the idea of escaping that necessity, but I shall not bore you with arguments showing that she never will. So long as children are brought into the world and made ready for the trenches, the factories and the gallows by the laborious method ordained of God, she will never be quite as free to roam and dream as man is. It is only a small minority of her sex who cherish a contrary expectation, and this minority, though anatomically female, is spiritually male. Show me a woman who has visions comparable, say, to those of Swedenborg, Woodrow Wilson, or Dr. Ghandi, and I'll show you a woman who is a very powerful anaphrodisiac.

Thus women, by their enforced preoccupation with the harsh facts of life, are extremely well fitted to write novels, which must deal with the facts or nothing. What they need for the practical business, in addition, falls under two heads. First, they need enough sense of social security to make them free to set down what they see.

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Secondly, they need the modest technical skill, the formal mastery of words and ideas, necessary to do it. The latter, I believe, they have had ever since they learned to read and write, say three hundred years ago; it comes to them more readily than to men, and is exercised with greater ease. The former they are fast acquiring. In the days of Aphra Behn and Ann Radcliffe it was almost as scandalous for a woman to put her observations and notions into print as it was for her to show her legs; even in the days of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë the thing was regarded as decidedly unladylike. But now, within certain limits, she is free to print whatever she pleases, and before long even those surviving limits will be obliterated. If I live to the year 1950 I expect to see a novel by a woman that will describe a typical marriage under Christianity, from the woman's standpoint, as realistically as it is treated from the man's standpoint in Upton Sinclair's *Love's Pilgrimage*. That novel, I venture to predict, will be epoch-making. At one stroke it will demolish superstitions that have prevailed in the Western World since the fall of the Roman Empire. It will seem harsh, but it will be true. And, being true, it will be a good novel. There can be no good one that is not true.

What ailed the women novelists, until very recently, was a lingering ladyism—a childish prudery inherited from their mothers. I believe that it is being rapidly thrown off; indeed, one often sees a concrete woman novelist shedding it. I give you two examples from America: Zona Gale and Willa Cather. Miss Gale

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started out by trying to put into novels the conventional prettiness that is esteemed along the Main Streets of her native Wisconsin. She had skill and did it well, and so she won a good deal of popular success. But her work was intrinsically as worthless as a treatise on international politics by a Labour leader, or a tract on the duties of a soldier and a gentleman by a war profiteer. Then, of a sudden, for some reason quite unknown to the deponent, she threw off that flabby artificiality, and began describing the people about her as they really were. The result was a second success even more pronounced than her first, and on a palpably higher level. The career of Miss Cather has covered less ground, for she began far above Main Street. What she tried to do at the start was to imitate the superficial sophistication of Edith Wharton and Henry James – a deceptive thing, apparently realistic in essence, but actually as conventional as table manners or the professional buffooneries of a fashionable dean. Miss Cather had extraordinary skill as a writer, and so her imitation was scarcely to be distinguished from the original, but in the course of time she began to be aware of its hollowness. Then she turned to first-hand representation – to pictures of the people she actually knew. There ensued a series of novels that rose step by step to the very distinguished quality of *My Antonia*. The fine piece is a great deal more than simply a good novel. It is a document in the history of American literature. It proves, once and for all time, that accurate representation is not inimical to beauty. It proves, on the contrary, that the most careful and penetrating representation is itself the source of a

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rare and wonderful beauty. No romantic novel ever written in America, by man or woman, is one half so beautiful as *My Antonia*.

As I have said, the novel, in England as elsewhere, still radiates an aroma of effeminacy, in the conventional sense. Specifically, it deals too monotonously with the varieties of human transactions which chiefly interest the unintelligent women who are its chief patrons and the scarcely less intelligent women who, until recently, were among its chief commercial manufacturers, to wit, the transactions that revolve around the ensnarement of men by women—the puerile tricks and conflicts of what is absurdly called romantic love. But I believe that the women novelists, as they emerge into the fullness of skill, will throw off all that old baggage, and leave it to male artisans. True enough, the snaring of men will remain the principal business of women in this world for many generations, but it would be absurd to say that intelligent women, even to-day, view it romantically—that is, as it is viewed by bad novelists. They see it realistically, and they see it, not as an end in itself, but as a means to other ends. It is, speaking generally, after she has got her man that a woman begins to live. The novel of the future, I believe, will show her thus living. It will depict the intricate complex of forces that conditions her life and generates her ideas, and it will show, against a background of actuality, her conduct in the eternal struggle between her aspiration and her destiny. Women, as I have argued, are not normally harassed by the grandiose and otiose visions that inflame the gizzards of men, but they,

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too, discover inevitably that life is a conflict, and that it is the harsh fate of *Homo sapiens* to get the worst of it. I should like to read a *Main Street* by an articulate Carol Kennicott, or a *Titan* by one of Cowperwood's mistresses, or a *Cytherea* by a Fanny Randon – or a Savina Grove! It would be sweet stuff, indeed. . . . And it will come

CHAPTER VI
OBSERVATIONS ON GOVERNMENT

§ 1. *Le Contrat Social*

ALL government, in its essence, is a conspiracy against the superior man: its one permanent object is to police him and cripple him. If it be aristocratic in organization, then it seeks to protect the man who is superior only by birth against the man who is superior in fact; if it be democratic, then it seeks to protect the man who is inferior in every way against both. Thus one of its primary functions is to regiment men by force, to make them as much alike as possible and as dependent upon one another as possible, to search out and combat originality among them. All it can see in an original idea is potential change, and hence an invasion of its prerogatives. The most dangerous man, to any government, is the man who is able to think things out for himself, without regard to the prevailing superstitions and taboos. Almost inevitably he comes to the conclusion that the government he lives under is dishonest, insane and intolerable, and so, if he is romantic, he tries to change it. And even if he is not romantic personally, he is very apt to spread discontent among those who are. Ludwig van Beethoven was certainly no politician. Nor was he a patriot. Nor had he any democratic illusions in him; he held the Viennese in even more contempt than he held the Hapsburgs. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the sharp criticism of the Hapsburg government that he used to loose in the cafés of Vienna had its effects – that some of his ideas of 1818, after a century of germination, got

themselves translated into acts of 1918. Beethoven, like all other first-rate men, greatly disliked the government he lived under. I add the names of Goethe, Heine, Wagner, and Nietzsche, to keep among Germans. That of Bismarck might follow: he admired the Hohenzollern idea, as Carlyle did, not the German people or the German administration. In his *Errinerungen*, whenever he discusses the government that he was a part of, he has difficulty in keeping his contempt within the bounds of decorum.

Nine times out of ten, it seems to me, the man who proposes a change in the government he lives under, no matter how defective it may be, is romantic to the verge of sentimentality. There is seldom, if ever, any evidence that the kind of government he is unlawfully inclined to would be any better than the government he proposes to supplant. Political revolutions, in truth, do not often accomplish anything of genuine value; their one undoubted effect is simply to throw out one gang of thieves and put in another. After a revolution, of course, the successful revolutionists always try to convince doubters that they have achieved great things, and usually they hang any man who denies it. But that surely doesn't prove their case. In Russia, for many years, the plain people were taught that getting rid of the Tsar would make them all rich and happy, but now that they have got rid of him they are poorer and unhappier than ever before. The Germans, with the Kaiser in exile, quickly discovered that a shoemaker turned statesman could be ten times as bad as a Hohenzollern. The Alsatians, having become Frenchmen again after forty-eight years'

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anxious wait, have responded to the boon by becoming Germanomaniacs. The Tyrolese, though they hated the Austrians, now hate the Italians enormously more. The Irish, having rid themselves of the English after 700 years of struggle, instantly discovered that government by Englishmen, compared to government by Irishmen, had its points. Even the American colonies gained little by their revolt in 1776. For twenty-five years after the Revolution they were in far worse condition as free states than they would have been as colonies. Their government was more expensive, more inefficient, more dishonest, and more tyrannical. It was only the gradual material progress of the country that saved them from starvation and collapse, and that material progress was due, not to the virtues of their new government, but to the lavishness of nature. Under the British hoof they would have got on just as well, and probably a great deal better.

The ideal government of all reflective men, from Aristotle to Herbert Spencer, is one which lets the individual alone – one which barely escapes being no government at all. This ideal, I believe, will be realized in the world twenty or thirty centuries after I have passed from these scenes and taken up my home in hell.

§ 2. *Capital Punishment*

Having argued against the death penalty with great heat and eloquence for more than twenty years, I hope I do not go beyond my rights when I now announce that I have begun to wobble, and feel a strong temptation

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to take the other side. My doubts, in all seriousness, I ascribe to the arguments of the current abolitionists. The more earnestly they set forth those arguments, the more I am harassed by suspicions that they are full of folly. A humane and Christian spirit, to be sure, is in them; but is there any sense? As I hint, I begin to doubt it. Consider the two that are oftenest heard:

1. That hanging a man is a dreadful business, degrading to those who have to do it and revolting to those who have to witness it.
2. That it is useless, for it does not deter others from the same crime.

The first of these arguments, it seems to me, is plainly too weak to need serious refutation. All it says, in brief, is that the work of the hangman is unpleasant. Granted. But suppose it is? It may be quite necessary to society for all that. There are, indeed, many other jobs that are unpleasant, and yet no one thinks of abolishing them. I pass over those connected with surgery, obstetrics, military science, journalism, and the sacred office, and point to one which, like that of the hangman, has to do with the execution of the laws: to wit, the post of an American judge under Prohibition. Consider what such a judge, executing the Volstead Act, must do nearly every day. He must assume that men whom he esteems and loves, men of his own profession, even his fellow-judges – in brief, the great body of wet and enlightened Christian Americans – are all criminals. And he must assume that a pack of spies and blackmailers whose mere presence, in private life, would gag him – in brief, the corps of Anti-Saloon League snouters and Prohibition agents – are truth-seekers and altruists. These assumptions are obvi-

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ously hard to make. Not a few judges, unable to make them, resign from the Bench; at least two have committed suicide. But the remaining judges, so long as they sit, must make them as in duty bound, whatever the outrage to their feelings. Many grow callous and suffer no more. So with the hangman, and his even more disagreeable offices. A man of delicate sensibilities, confronting them, would die of horror, but there is no evidence that they are revolting to the men who actually discharge them. I have known hangmen, indeed, who delighted in their art, and practised it proudly. I have never heard of one who threw up his job.

In the second argument of the abolitionists there is more force, but even here, I believe, the ground under them is very shaky. Their fundamental error consists in assuming that the whole aim of punishing criminals is to deter other (potential) criminals – that we hang A simply in order to so alarm B that he will not kill C. This, I believe, is an assumption almost as inaccurate as those which must be made by an American judge. It confuses a part with the whole. Deterrence, obviously, is *one* of the aims of punishment, but it is surely not the only one. On the contrary, there are at least half a dozen, and some of them are probably quite as important. At least one of them, practically considered, is *more* important. Commonly, it is described as revenge, but revenge is really not the word for it. I borrow a better term from the late Aristotle: *katharsis*. *Katharsis*, so used, means a salubrious discharge of emotions, a healthy letter off of steam. A schoolboy, disliking his master, deposits a tack upon the

pedagogical chair; the master jumps and the boy laughs. This is *katharsis*. A Chicago bootlegger, paying his weekly bribe to a Prohibition agent, gives him a counterfeit \$10 note; the agent, dropping it in the poor-box at church on Sunday, is arrested and jailed. This is also *katharsis*. A subscriber to a newspaper, observing his name spelled incorrectly in the report of a meeting, spreads a report that the editor of the paper is in the pay of the Bolsheviki. This again is *katharsis*.

What I contend is that one of the prime objects of judicial punishments is to afford this grateful *katharsis* (*a*) to the immediate victims of the criminal punished, and (*b*) to the general body of moral and timorous men. These persons, and particularly the first group, are concerned only indirectly with deterring other criminals. The thing they crave primarily is the satisfaction of seeing the criminal before them suffer as he made them suffer. What they want is the peace of mind that goes with the feeling that accounts are squared. Until they get that satisfaction they are in a state of emotional tension, and hence unhappy. The instant they get it they are comfortable. I do not argue that this yearning is noble; I simply argue that it is almost universal among human beings. In the face of injuries that are unimportant and can be borne without damage it may yield to higher impulses: that is to say, it may yield to what is called Christian charity. But it never so yields when the injury is serious, and gives substantial and permanent satisfaction to the person inflicting it. Here Christianity is adjourned, and even saints reach for their side-arms. The

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better the Christian, in fact, the more violent his demand for *katharsis* – once he has unloaded the Beatitudes. On lower levels, it is plainly asking too much of human nature to expect it to conquer so natural an impulse. A keeps a shop and has an assistant, B. B steals £20, hands it to a bookmaker for investment, and is cleaned out. What is A to do? Let B go? If he does so he will be unable to sleep at night. The sense of injury, of injustice, will keep him awake. So he turns B over to the police, and they send him to prison. Thereafter A can sleep. More, he has pleasant dreams. He pictures B chained to the wall of a dungeon a hundred feet underground, devoured by rats. It is so agreeable that it makes him forget his £20. He has got his *katharsis*.

The same thing precisely takes place on a larger scale when there is a crime which destroys a whole community's feeling of security. Every law-abiding citizen feels menaced and frustrated until the criminals have been struck down – until the communal capacity to get even with them, and more than even, has been dramatically demonstrated. Here the business of deterring others is no more than an afterthought. The main thing is to destroy the scoundrels whose act has alarmed everyone, and thus made everyone unhappy. Until they are brought to book that unhappiness continues; when the law has been executed upon them there is a sigh of relief. In other words, there is *katharsis*.

There is no public demand for the death penalty for ordinary crimes. But for offences involving the deliberate and inexcusable taking of human life, by men openly

defiant of all civilized order – for such offences it seems, to nine men out of ten, a just and proper punishment. Any lesser punishment leaves them feeling that the criminal has got the better of society – that he can add insult to injury by laughing. That feeling is intensely unpleasant, and no wonder! It can be dissipated only by a recourse to *katharsis*, the invention of the aforesaid Aristotle. That *katharsis* is most effectively and economically achieved, as human nature now is, by wafting the criminal to realms of bliss.

§ 3. *Jack Ketch as Eugenist*

Meanwhile, has any historian ever noticed the salubrious effect, on the English character, of the frenzy for hanging that went on in England during the eighteenth century? When I say salubrious, of course, I mean in the purely social sense. At the end of the seventeenth century the Englishman was still one of the most turbulent and lawless of civilized men; at the beginning of the nineteenth he was one of the most law-abiding; *i.e.*, the most conservative and docile. What worked the change in him? I believe that it was worked by the rope of Jack Ketch. During the eighteenth century the lawless strain was simply choked out of the race. Perhaps a third of those in whose veins it ran were actually hanged; the rest were chased out of England, never to return. Some fled to Ireland, and revived the decaying Irish race: in practically all the Irish rebels of the past century there have been plain traces of English blood. Others went to the Dominions. Yet others went to the United States,

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and after helping to conquer the Western wilderness, begat the gun-men, Prohibition agents, and other gaudy criminals who flourish in the Republic to-day.

The murder rate is very low in England, perhaps the lowest in the world. It is low because nearly all the potential ancestors of murderers were hanged or exiled in the eighteenth century. Why is it so high in the United States? Because most of the potential ancestors of murderers, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were *not* hanged. And why did they escape? For two plain reasons. First, the existing government was too weak to track them down and execute them, especially in the West. Second, the qualities of daring and enterprise that went with their murderousness were so valuable that it was socially profitable to overlook their homicides. In other words, the job of occupying and organizing the vast domain of the new nation was one that demanded the aid of men who, among other things, occasionally butchered their fellow-men. The butchering had to be winked at in order to get their help. Thus the murder rate, on the frontier, rose to unprecedented heights, while the execution rate remained very low. Probably 100,000 men altogether were murdered in the territory west of the Ohio between 1776 and 1865; probably not 100 of them were formally executed. When the murderers were punished at all, it was by other murderers – and this left the strain unimpaired.

CHAPTER VII

THE ART ETERNAL

ONE of the laudable by-products of the Freudian necromancy is the discovery that lying, in most cases, is involuntary and inevitable – that the liar can no more avoid it than he can avoid blinking his eyes when a light flashes, or jumping when a bomb goes off behind him. At its worst, indeed, this necessity takes on a downright pathological character, and is thus as innocent as sciatica or albuminuria. It is part of the morbid baggage of hysterics and neurasthenics: their lying is simply a symptom of their compulsive effort to adjust themselves to an environment which bears upon them too harshly for endurance. The rest of us are not quite so hard pushed, but pushed we all are. In us the thing works through the inferiority complex, which no man can escape. He who lacks it entirely is actually reckoned insane by the fact: his satisfaction with his situation in the world is indistinguishable from a delusion of grandeur. The great majority of us – all, in brief, who are normal – pass through life in constant revolt against our limitations, objective and subjective. Our conscious thought is largely devoted to plans and specifications for cutting a better figure in human society, and in our unconscious the business goes on much more steadily and powerfully. No healthy man, in his secret heart, is content with his destiny. Even the late Woodrow Wilson, during his dizzy term as the peer of Lincoln and Washington, was obviously tantalized by the reflection that, in earlier ages, there had been Martin Luther, St. Ignatius Loyola,

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and Paul of Tarsus. We are tortured by such dreams and images as a child is tortured by the thought of a state of existence in which it would live in a sweet-shop and have two stomachs. The more we try to put the obscene apparition away, the more it haunts and badgers us.

Lying is the product of the unconscious yearning to realize such visions, and if the policeman, conscience, prevents the lie being put into plain words, then it is at least put into more or less plausible acts. We all play parts when we face our fellow-men, as even poets have noticed. No man could bring himself to reveal his true character, and, above all, his true limitations as a citizen and a Christian, his true meannesses, his true imbecilities, to his friends, or even to his wife. Honest autobiography is therefore a contradiction in terms: the moment a man considers himself, even *in petto*, he tries to gild and fresco himself. Thus a man's wife, however realistic her view of him, always flatters him in the end, for the worst she sees in him is appreciably better, by the time she sees it, than what is actually there. What she sees, even at times of the most appalling domestic revelation and confidence, is not the authentic man at all, but a compound made up in part of the authentic man and in part of his projection of a gaudy ideal. The man who is most respected by his wife is the one who makes this projection most vivid — that is, the one who is the most daring and ingratiating liar. He can never, of course, deceive her utterly, but if he is skilful he may at least deceive her enough to make her happy.

Omnis homo mendax: thus the Psalmist. So far the

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Freudians merely parrot him. What is new in their gospel is the doctrine that lying is instinctive, normal, and unavoidable – that a man is forced into it by his very will-to-live. This doctrine purges the business of certain ancient embarrassments, and restores innocence to the heart. Think of a lie as a compulsion neurose, and you think of it more kindly. I need not add, I hope, that this transfer of it from the department of free will to that of determinism by no means disposes of the penalty that traditionally pursues it, supposing it to be detected and resented. The proponents of free will always make the mistake of assuming that the determinists are simply evil fellows looking for a way to escape the just consequences of their transgressing. No sense is in that assumption. If I lie in the witness-box and am detected by the learned judge, I am jailed for perjury forthwith, regardless of my helplessness under compulsion. Here justice refuses absolutely to distinguish between a misfortune and a tort: the overt act is all it is concerned with. But as jurisprudence grows more intelligent and more civilized it may change its tune, to the benefit of liars, which is to say, to the benefit of humanity. Science is unflinchingly deterministic, and it has begun to force its determinism into morals. We no longer flog a child afflicted with nocturnal enuresis; we have substituted concepts of mental aberration for concepts of crime in a whole series of cases: kleptomania, pyromania, etc.; and, in the United States, at least, the old savage punishment of murderers is now ameliorated by considerations of psychiatry, and even of honour. On some shining to-morrow a psycho-

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analyst may be put into the box to prove that perjury is simply a compulsion neurose, like beating time with the foot at a concert, or counting the lamp-posts along the highway.

However, I have but small faith in millenniums, and do not formally predict this one. Nor do I pronounce any moral judgment, pro or con: moral judgments, as old Friedrich used to say, are foreign to my nature. But let us not forget that lying, *per se*, is not forbidden by the moral code of Christendom. Holy Writ dismisses it cynically, and the statutes of all civilized states are silent about it. Only the Chinese, indeed, make it a penal offence. Perjury, of course, is prohibited everywhere, and also any mendacity which amounts to fraud and deprives a fellow-man of his property, but that far more common form of truth-stretching which has only the lesser aim of augmenting the liar's personal dignity and consequence — this is looked upon with a very charitable eye. So is that form which has the aim of helping another person in the same way. In the latter direction lying may even take on the stature of a positive virtue. The late King of a great free nation, in his youth, attained to popularity throughout Christendom by venturing into what, in a lesser man, would have amounted to perjury. Summoned into a court of law to give expert testimony regarding some act of adultery, he lied like a gentleman, as the phrase goes, to protect a woman. The lie, to be sure, was intrinsically useless; few, in all probability, believed that the lady was innocent. Nevertheless, every decent Christian applauded the perjurer for his good intentions,

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including even the judge on the Bench, sworn to combat false witness by every resource of forensics. All of us, worms that we are, occasionally face the alternatives that confronted this royal gentleman. On the one hand, we may tell the truth, regardless of consequences, and on the other hand we may mellow it and sophisticate it to make it humane and tolerable. It is universally held that the man who chooses the first course is despicable. He may be highly moral, but he is nevertheless a cad – as highly moral men have so curious a way of being. But if he lies boldly, then he is held to be a man of honour, and is respected as such by all other men of honour.

For the habitual truth-teller and truth-seeker, indeed, the world has very little liking. He is always unpopular, and not infrequently his unpopularity is so excessive that it endangers his life. Run your eye back over the list of martyrs, lay and clerical: nine-tenths of them, you will find, stood accused of nothing worse than honest efforts to find out and announce the truth. Even to-day, with the scientific passion become familiar in the world, the general view of such fellows is highly unfavourable. The typical scientist, the typical critic of institutions, the typical truth-seeker in every field, is held under suspicion by the great majority of men, and variously beset by posses of relentless foes. If he tries to tell the truth about the Government, its agents seek to silence him and punish him. If he turns to fiction and endeavours to depict his fellow-men accurately, he has the Puritans on his hands. In no field can he count upon a friendly audience, and freedom from assault. Especially in a democratic country is his

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whole enterprise viewed with bilious eyes. The men the American people, for example, admire most extravagantly are the most daring liars; the men they detest most violently are those who try to tell them the truth. A Galileo could no more be elected President of the United States than he could be elected Pope of Rome. Both high posts are reserved for men favoured by God with an extraordinary genius for swathing the bitter facts of life in bandages of soft illusion.

Behind this almost unanimous distrust of the truth-teller there is a sound and sure instinct, as there is behind every other manifestation of crowd feeling. What it shows is simply this: that the truth is something too harsh and devastating for the majority of men to bear. In their secret hearts they know themselves, and they can suffer the thought of themselves only by idealizing the facts. The more trivial, loathsome and degraded the reality, the more powerful and relentless must be the idealization. An Aristotle, I dare say, may be able occasionally to regard himself searchingly and dispassionately – but certainly not an ordinary man. Here we come back to what we began with: the inferiority complex. The truth-seeker forgets it, and so comes to grief. He forgets that the ordinary man, at bottom, is always afraid of himself, as of some horrible monster. He refuses to sanction the lie whereby the ordinary man maintains his self-respect, just as the bounder, put upon the stand, refuses to support the lie whereby a woman maintains the necessary theory of her chastity. Thus he is unpopular, and deserves to be.

Then why does he go on? Why does he kick up such

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a pother and suffer such barbarous contumely, all to no end – for the majority of so-called truths, it must be evident, perish as soon as they are born: no one will believe them. The answer probably is that the truth-seeker is moved by the same obscure inner necessity (in Joseph Conrad's phrase) that animates the artist. Something within him, something entirely beyond his volition, forces him to pursue his fanatical and useless quest – some impulse as blind as that which moves a puppy to chase its tail. Again the compulsion neurose! But this one differs materially from that of the liar. The latter is hygienic; it makes for peace, health, happiness. The former makes only for strife and discontent. It invades the immemorial pruderies of the human race. It breeds scandals and heart-burnings. It is essentially anti-social, and hence, by modern theories of criminology, diseased. The truth-seeker thus becomes a pathological case. The average man is happily free from any such malaise. He avoids the truth as diligently as he avoids arson, regicide, or piracy on the high seas, and for the same reason: because he believes that it is dangerous, that no good can come of it, that it doesn't pay. The very thought of it is abhorrent to him. This average man, I believe, must be accepted as the normal man, the natural man, the healthy and useful man. He presents a character that is general in the race, and favourable to its security and contentment. The truth never caresses; it stings – and life is surely too short for sane men to be stinging themselves unnecessarily. One would regard it as idiotic even in a flea.

Thus the truth about the truth emerges, and with it

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the truth about lying. Lying is not only excusable; it is not only innocent, and instinctive; it is, above all, necessary and unavoidable. Without the amelioration that it offers life would become a mere syllogism and hence too metallic to be borne. The man who lies simply submits himself sensibly to the grand sweep and ripple of the cosmic process. The man who seeks and tells the truth is a rebel against the inner nature of all of us.

CHAPTER VIII
FOUR MEN AT RANDOM

§ I. *Conrad*

SOME time ago I put in a blue afternoon re-reading Joseph Conrad's *Youth*. A *blue* afternoon? What nonsense! The touch of the man is like the touch of Schubert. One approaches him in various and unhappy moods: depressed, dubious, despairing; one leaves him in the clear, yellow sunshine that Nietzsche found in Bizet's music. But here again the phrase is inept. Sunshine suggests the imbecile, barnyard joy of the human turnip – the official optimism of an increasingly insane world. What the enigmatical Pole has to offer is something quite different. If its parallel is to be found in music, it is not in Schubert, but in Beethoven – perhaps even more accurately in Johann Sebastian Bach. It is the joy, not of mere satisfaction, but of understanding – the profound but surely not merry delight which goes with the comprehension of a fundamental fact – above all, of a fact that has been coy and elusive. Certainly the order of the world that Conrad sets forth with such diabolical eloquence and plausibility is no banal moral order, no childish sequence of virtuous causes and edifying effects. Rather it has an atheistic and even demoniacal smack: to the earnest Christian it must be more than a little disconcerting. The god he visualizes is no loving papa in a worn-out housecoat, inculcating the great principles of Christian ethics by applying occasional strokes *a posteriori*. What he sees is something quite different: an extremely ingenious and humorous Improvisatore and Comedian, with a dab of

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red on his nose and maybe somewhat the worse for drink – a furious and far from amiable banjoist upon the human spine, and rattler of human bones. Kurtz, in *Youth*, makes a capital banjo for that exalted and cynical talent. And the music that issues forth – what a superb *Hexentanz* it is!

One of the curiosities of critical stupidity is the doctrine that Conrad is without humour. No doubt it flows out of a more general error: to wit, the assumption that tragedy is always pathetic, that death itself is inevitably a gloomy business. That error, I suppose, will persist in the world until some extraordinary astute mime conceives the plan of playing *King Lear* as a farce – I mean deliberately. That it *is* a farce seems to me quite as obvious as the fact that *Romeo and Juliet* is another, this time lamentably coarse. To adopt the contrary theory – to view it as a great moral and spiritual spectacle, capable of purging and uplifting the psyche like marriage to a red-haired widow or a month in the trenches – to toy with such notions is to borrow the critical standards of a party of old ladies weeping over the damnation of the heathen. In point of fact, death, like love, is intrinsically farcical – a solemn kicking of a brick under a hat – and most other human agonies, once they transcend the physical – *i.e.*, the unescapably real – have far more of irony in them than of pathos. Looking back upon them after they have eased one seldom shivers: one smiles – perhaps sourly but nevertheless spontaneously. This, at all events, is the notion that seems to me implicit in every line of Conrad. I give you *Heart of Darkness* as the

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archetype of his whole work and the keystone of his metaphysical system. Here we have all imaginable human hopes and aspirations reduced to one common denominator of folly and failure, and here we have a play of humour that is infinitely mordant and searching. Turn to the burial of the helmsman. Turn, then, to Marlow's last interview with Kurtz's intended. The farce mounts by slow stages to dizzy and breath-taking heights. One hears harsh roars of cosmic laughter, vast splutterings of transcendental mirth, echoing and re-echoing down the black corridors of empty space. The curtain descends at last upon a wild dance in a dissecting-room. The mutilated dead rise up and jig. . . .

It is curious, re-reading a thrice-familiar story, how often one finds surprises in it. I have been amazed, toward the close of *The End of the Tether*, to discover that the *Fair Maid* was wrecked, not by the deliberate act of Captain Whalley, but by the machination of the unspeakable Massy. How is one to account for so preposterous an error? Certainly I thought I knew *The End of the Tether* as well as I knew anything in this world — and yet there was that incredible misunderstanding of it, lodged firmly in my mind. Perhaps there is criticism of a sort in my blunder: it may be a fact that the old skipper willed the thing himself — that his willing it is visible in all that goes before — that Conrad, in introducing Massy's puerile infamy at the end, made some sacrifice of inner veracity to the exigencies of what, at bottom, is somewhat too neat and well-made a tale. The story, in fact, belongs to the author's earlier manner; I guess

that it was written before *Youth*, and surely before *Heart of Darkness*. But for all that, its proportions remain truly colossal. It is one of the most magnificent narratives, long or short, old or new, in the English language, and with *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness* it makes up what is probably the best book of imaginative writing that the English literature of the twentieth century can yet show. Conrad learned a great deal after he wrote it, true enough. In *Lord Jim*, in *Victory*, and, above all, in *A Personal Record*, there are momentary illuminations, blinding flashes of brilliance that he was incapable of in those days of experiment; but no other book of his seems to me to hold so steadily to so high a general level – none other, as a whole, is more satisfying and more marvellous. There is in *Heart of Darkness* a perfection of design which one encounters only rarely and miraculously in prose fiction: it belongs rather to music. I can't imagine taking a single sentence out of that stupendous tale without leaving a visible gap; it is as thoroughly *durch komponiert* as a fugue. And I can't imagine adding anything to it, even so little as a word, without doing it damage. As it stands it is austere and beautifully perfect, just as the slow movement of the Unfinished Symphony is perfect.

I observe of late a tendency to examine the English of Conrad rather biliously. This folly is cultivated chiefly in England, where, I suppose, chauvinistic motives enter into the matter. It is the just boast of great empires that they draw in talents from near and far, exhausting the little nations to augment their own puissance; it is their misfortune that these talents often remain defectively

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assimilated. Conrad remained the Slav to the end. The people of his tales, whatever he calls them, are always as much Slavs as he is; the language in which he describes them retains a sharp, exotic flavour. But to say that this flavour constitutes a blemish is to say something so preposterous that only grammarians and their dupes may be thought of as giving it credit. The truly first-rate writer is not one who uses the language as such dolts demand that it be used; he is one who reworks it in spite of their prohibitions. It is his distinction that he thinks in a manner different from the thinking of ordinary men; that he is free from that slavery to embalmed ideas which makes them so respectable and so dull. Obviously, he cannot translate his notions into terms of every day without doing violence to their inner integrity; as well ask a Richard Strauss to funnel all his music into the chaste jugs of Prof. Dr. Jadassohn. What Conrad brought into English literature was a new concept of the relations between fact and fact, idea and idea, and what he contributed to the complex and difficult art of writing English was a new way of putting words together. His style now amazes and irritates pedants because it does not roll along in the old ruts. Well, it was precisely that rolling along in the old ruts that he tried to avoid – and it was precisely that avoidance which made him what he was. What lies under most of his alleged sins seems to me to be simple enough: he views English logically and analytically, and not through a haze of senseless traditions and arbitrary taboos. No Oxford mincing is in him. If he cannot find his phrase above the salt, he seeks it below. His

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English, in a word, is innocent. And if, at times, there gets into it a colour that is strange, and even bizarre, then the fact is something to rejoice over, for a living language is like a man suffering incessantly from small internal hæmorrhages, and what it needs above all else is constant transfusions of new blood from other tongues. The day the gates go up, that day it begins to die.

A very great man, this Mr. Conrad. As yet, I believe decidedly underestimated, even by many of his post-mortem advocates. Most of his first acclaimers mistook him for a mere romantic—a talented but somewhat uncouth follower of the Stevenson tradition, with the orthodox cutlass exchanged for a Malay *kris*. Later on he began to be heard of as a linguistic and vocational marvel: it was astonishing that any man bred to Polish should write English at all, and more astonishing that a country gentleman from the Ukraine should hold a master's certificate in the British merchant marine. Such banal attitudes are now archaic, but I suspect that they have been largely responsible for the slowness with which his fame has spread in the world. At all events, he is vastly less read and esteemed in foreign parts than he ought to be, and very few continental Europeans have risen to any genuine comprehension of his stature. When one reflects that the Nobel Prize was given to such third-raters as Benavente, Heidenstam, Gjellerup and Tagore, with Conrad passed over, one begins to grasp the depth and density of the ignorance prevailing in the world, even among the relatively enlightened. One *Lord Jim*, as human document and as work of art, is worth all the works

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produced by all the Benaventes and Gjellerups since the time of Rameses II. It is, indeed, an indecency of criticism to speak of such unlike things in the same breath: as well talk of Brahms in terms of Mendelssohn. Nor is *Lord Jim* a chance masterpiece, an isolated peak. On the contrary, it is but one unit in a long series of extraordinary and almost incomparable works – a series sprung suddenly and overwhelmingly into full dignity with *Almayer's Folly*. I challenge the nobility and gentry of Christendom to point to another Opus 1 as magnificently planned and turned out as *Almayer's Folly*. The more one studies it, the more it seems miraculous. If it is not a work of absolute genius, then no work of absolute genius exists on this earth.

§ 2. *Beethoven*

Beethoven was one of those lucky men whose stature, viewed in retrospect, grows steadily. How many movements have there been to put him on the shelf? At least a dozen in the hundred years since his death. There was one only a few years ago in New York, launched by idiot critics and supported by the war fever: his place, it appeared, was to be taken by such prophets of the new enlightenment as Stravinsky! The net result of that movement was simply that the best orchestra in America went to pot – and Beethoven survived unscathed. It is, indeed, almost impossible to imagine displacing him – at all events, in the concert-hall, where the challenge of Bach cannot reach him. Surely the nineteenth century was not deficient in master musicians. It produced

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Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Wagner, and Brahms, to say nothing of a whole horde of Dvořáks, Tschaikowskys, Debussys, Ruffs, Verdis, and Puccinis. Yet it gave us nothing better than the first movement of the *Eroica*. That movement, the first challenge of the new music, remains its last word. It is the noblest piece of absolute music ever written in the sonata form, and it is the noblest piece of programme music. In Beethoven, indeed, the distinction between the two became purely imaginary. Everything he wrote was, in a way, programme music, including even the first two symphonies, and everything was absolute music, including even the *Battle grotesquerie*. (Is the latter, indeed, as bad as ancient report makes it? Why doesn't some *Kappelmeister* let us hear it?)

It was a bizarre jest of the gods to pit Beethoven, in his first days in Vienna, against Papa Haydn. Haydn was undeniably a genius of the first water, and, after Mozart's death, had no apparent reason to fear a rival. If he did not actually create the symphony as we know it to-day, then he at least enriched the form with its first genuine masterpieces – and not with a scant few, but literally with dozens. Tunes of the utmost loveliness gushed from him like oil from a well. More, he knew how to manage them; he was a master of musical architectonics. If his music is sniffed at to-day, then it is only by fools; there are at least six of his symphonies that are each worth all the cacophony hatched by a whole herd of Schönbergs and Eric Saties, with a couple of Korngolds thrown in to flavour the pot. But when Beethoven stepped in, then

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poor old Papa had to step down. It was like pitting a gazelle against an aurochs. One colossal bellow, and the combat was over. Musicians are apt to look at it as a mere contest of technicians. They point to the vastly greater skill and ingenuity of Beethoven — his firmer grip upon his materials, his greater daring and resourcefulness, his far better understanding of dynamics, rhythms and clang-tints — in brief, his tremendously superior musicianship. But that was not what made him so much greater than Haydn — for Haydn, too, had his superiorities; for example, his far readier inventiveness, his capacity for making better tunes. What lifted Beethoven above the old master, and above all other men of music save perhaps Bach and Brahms, was simply his greater dignity as a man. The feelings that Haydn put into tone were the feelings of a country pastor, a rather civilized stockbroker, a viola player gently mellowed by Kulmbacher. When he wept it was with the tears of a woman who has discovered another wrinkle; when he rejoiced it was with the joy of a child on Christmas morning. But the feelings that Beethoven put into his music were the feelings of a god. There was something Olympian in his snarls and rages, and there was a touch of hell-fire in his mirth.

It is almost a literal fact that there is not a trace of cheapness in the whole body of his music. He is never sweet and romantic; he never sheds conventional tears; he never strikes orthodox attitudes. In his lightest moods there is the immense and inescapable dignity of the ancient Hebrew prophets. He concerns himself, not with the

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puerile agonies of love, but with the eternal tragedy of man. He is a great tragic poet, and like all great tragic poets, he is obsessed by a sense of the inscrutable meaninglessness of life. From the Second Symphony onward he seldom departs from that theme. It roars through the first movement of the C minor, and it comes to a stupendous final statement in the Ninth. All this, in his day, was new in music, and so it caused murmurs of surprise, and even indignation. The step from Mozart's Jupiter to the first movement of the Eroica was uncomfortable; the Viennese began to wriggle in their stalls. But there was one among them who didn't wriggle, and that was Franz Schubert. Turn to the first movement of his Unfinished or to the slow movement of his Tragic, and you will see how quickly the example of Beethoven was followed – and with what genius! But there was a long hiatus after that, with Mendelssohn, Weber, Chopin and company performing upon their pretty pipes. Eventually the day of November 6, 1876, dawned in Karlsruhe, and with it came the first performance of Brahms' C minor. Once more the gods walked in the concert-hall. They will walk again when another Brahms is born, but not before. For nothing can come out of an artist that is not in the man. What ails the music of all the Tschai-kowskys, Stravinskys – and Strausses? What ails it is that it is the music of shallow men. It is often, in its way, lovely. It bristles with charming musical ideas. It is infinitely ingenious and workmanlike. But it is as hollow, at bottom, as a bull by a bishop. It is the music of second-rate men.

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Beethoven disdained all their artifices: he didn't need them. It would be hard to think of a composer, even of the fourth rate, who worked with thematic material of less intrinsic merit. He borrowed tunes wherever he found them; he made them up out of snatches of country jigs; when he lacked one altogether he contented himself with a simple phrase, a few banal notes. All such things he viewed simply as raw materials; his interest was concentrated upon their use. To that use of them he brought the appalling powers of his unrivalled genius. His ingenuity began where that of other men left off. His most complicated structures retained the overwhelming clarity of the Parthenon. And into them he got a kind of feeling that even the Greeks could seldom match; he was pre-eminently a modern man, with all trace of the barbarian vanished. In his gorgeous music there went all of the high scepticism that was of the essence of the eighteenth century, but into it there also went the new enthusiasm, the new determination to challenge and beat the gods, that dawned with the nineteenth.

The older I grow, the more I am convinced that the most portentous phenomenon in the whole history of music was the first public performance of the *Eroica* on April 7, 1805. The manufacturers of programme notes have swathed that gigantic work in so many layers of childish legend and speculation that its intrinsic merits have been almost forgotten. Was it dedicated to Napoleon I? If so, was the dedication sincere or ironical? Who cares — that is, who with ears? It might have been dedicated, just as well, to Louis XIV, Paracelsus, or

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Pontius Pilate. What makes it worth discussing, to-day and for ever, is the fact that on its very first page Beethoven threw his hat into the ring and laid his claim to immortality. Bang! – and he is off! No compromise! No easy bridge from the past! The Second Symphony is already miles behind. A new order of music has been born. The very manner of it is full of challenge. There is no sneaking into the foul business by way of a mellifluous and disarming introduction; no preparatory hemming and hawing to cajole the audience and enable the conductor to find his place in the score. Nay! Out of silence comes the angry crash of the tonic triad, and then at once, with no pause, the first statement of the first subject – grim, domineering, harsh, raucous, and yet curiously lovely – with its astounding collision with that electrical C sharp. The carnage has begun early; we are only in the seventh measure! In the thirteenth and fourteenth comes the incomparable roll down the simple scale of E flat – and what follows is all that has ever been said, perhaps all that ever *will* be said, about music-making in the grand manner. What was afterward done, even by Beethoven, was done in the light of that perfect example. Every line of modern music that is honestly music bears some sort of relation to that epoch-making first movement.

The rest is Beethovenish, but not quintessence. There is a legend that the funeral march was put in simply because it was a time of wholesale butchery, and funeral marches were in fashion. No doubt the first-night audience in Vienna, shocked and addled by the piled-up defiances of the first movement, found the lugubrious

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strains grateful. But the *scherzo*? Another felonious assault upon poor Papa Haydn! Two giants boxing clumsily, to a crazy piping by an orchestra of dwarfs. No wonder some honest Viennese in the gallery yelled: 'I'd give another kreutzer if the thing would stop!' Well, it stopped finally, and then came something reassuring – a theme with variations. Everyone in Vienna knew and esteemed Beethoven's themes with variations. He was, in fact, the rising master of themes with variations in the town. But a joker remained in the pack. The variations grew more and more complex and surprising. Strange novelties got into them. The polite exercises became tempestuous, moody, cacophonous, tragic. At the end a harsh, hammering, exigent row of chords – the C minor Symphony casting its sinister shadow before!

It must have been a great night in Vienna. But perhaps not for the actual Viennese. They went to hear 'a new grand symphony in D sharp' (*sic!*). What they found in the Theater-an-der-Wien was a revolution!

§ 3. *Emerson*

One discerns, in all latter-day criticism, both European and American, the doctrine that Ralph Waldo Emerson was a great man, but the specifications supporting that doctrine are seldom displayed with any clarity. Despite the vast mass of writing about him, he remains to be worked out critically; practically all the existing criticism of him is marked by his own mellifluous obscurity. Perhaps a part of this obscurity is due to contradictions inherent in the man's character. He was dualism ambulant. What

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he actually *was* was seldom identical with what he represented himself to be, or what his admirers thought him to be. Universally greeted, in his own day, as a revolutionary, he was, in point of fact, imitative and cautious – an importer of stale German elixirs, sometimes direct and sometimes through the Carlylean branch house, who took good care to dilute them with buttermilk before merchenting them to his countrymen. The theoretical spokesman, all his life long, of bold and forthright thinking, of the unafraid statement of ideas, he stated his own so warily and so muggily that they were ratified on the one hand by Nietzsche, and on the other hand by the messiahs of the New Thought, that typically American bunkum.

What one notices about him at home is chiefly his lack of influence upon the main stream of American thought, such as it is. He had admirers and even worshippers, but no apprentices. Nietzscheism and the New Thought are alike tremendous violations of orthodox American doctrine. The one makes a headlong attack upon egalitarianism, the corner-stone of American politics; the other substitutes mysticism, which is the notion that the true realities are all concealed, for the prevailing American notion that the only true realities lie upon the surface, and are easily discerned by Congressmen, newspaper leader-writers and Wesleyan clergymen. The Emerson cult, in America, has been an affectation from the start. Not many of the literary schoolmasters and other such bogus *intelligentsia* who devote themselves to it have any intelligible understanding of the Trans-

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cedentialism at the heart of it, and not one of them, so far as I can make out, has even executed Emerson's command to 'defer never to the popular cry.' On the contrary, it is precisely within the circle of Emersonian adulation that one finds the greatest tendency to test all ideas by their respectability, to combat free thought as something intrinsically vicious, and to yield placidly to 'some great decorum, some fetish of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man.' It is surely not unworthy of notice that the country of this prophet of Man Thinking is precisely the country in which every sort of dissent from the current hallucinations is combated most ferociously, and in which there is the most vigorous existing tendency to suppress free speech altogether.

Thus Emerson, on the side of ideas, has left but faint tracks behind him in his native land. His quest was for 'facts amidst appearances,' and his whole metaphysic revolved around a doctrine of transcendental first causes, a conception of interior and immutable realities, distinct from and superior to mere transient phenomena. But the philosophy that actually prevails among his countrymen — a philosophy put into caressing terms by William James — teaches an almost exactly contrary doctrine: its central idea is that whatever satisfies the immediate need is substantially true, that appearance is the only form of fact worthy the consideration of a man with money in the bank, and the old flag floating over him, and hair on his chest. Nor has Emerson had any ponderable influence as a literary artist in the technical sense, or as the prophet of a culture — that is, at home.

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Despite the feeble imitations of young university critics, his manner has vanished with his matter. There is, in the true sense, no Emersonian school of American writers. Current American writing, with its cocksureness, its somewhat hard competence, its air of selling goods, is utterly at war with his loose, impressionistic method, his often mystifying groping for ideas, his relentless pursuit of phrases. In the same way, one searches the Republic in vain for any general reaction to the cultural ideal that he set up. When one casts about for salient men whom he moved profoundly, men who got light from his torch, one thinks first and last, not of Americans, but of such men as Nietzsche and Hermann Grimm, the Germans, and Tyndall and Matthew Arnold, the Englishmen. What remains of him at home, as I have said, is no more than, on the one hand, a somewhat absurd affectation of intellectual fastidiousness, now almost extinct even in New England, and, on the other hand, a debased Transcendentalism rolled into pills for fat women with vague pains and inattentive husbands – in brief, the New Thought – in brief, imbecility. This New Thought, a decadent end-product of American superficiality, now almost monopolizes him. One hears of him in its preposterous literature, and one hears of him in textbooks for the young, but not often elsewhere. Allowing everything, it would surely be absurd to hold that he has coloured and conditioned the main stream of American thought as Goethe coloured and conditioned the thought of Germany, or Pushkin that of Russia, or Voltaire that of France. . . .

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§ 4. *Lincoln*

The backwardness of the art of biography in the United States is made shinningly visible by the fact that its *literati* have yet to produce a first-rate life of either Lincoln or Whitman. Of Lincolniana, of course, there is no end, nor is there any end to the hospitality of those American fanciers who collect it. Some time ago a publisher told me that there are four kinds of books that never, under any circumstances, lose money in the Republic — first, detective stories; secondly, novels in which the heroine is forcibly debauched by the hero; thirdly, volumes on spiritualism, occultism, and other such claptrap; and fourthly, books on Lincoln. But despite all the vast mass of Lincolniana afloat in America and the constant discussion of old Abe in other ways, even so elemental a problem as that of his religious faith — surely an important matter in any competent biography — is yet but half solved. Here, for example, is the Rev. William E. Barton, grappling with it for more than four hundred large pages in *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*. It is a lengthy inquiry — the rev. pastor, in truth, shows a good deal of the habitual garrulity of his order — but it is never tedious. On the contrary, it is curious and amusing, and I have read it with steady interest, including even the appendices. Unluckily, the author, like his predecessors, fails to finish the business before him. Was Lincoln a Christian? Did he believe in the Divinity of Christ? I am left in doubt. He was very polite about it, and very cautious, as befitted a politician in need of Christian

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votes, but how much genuine conviction was in that politeness? And if his occasional references to Christ were thus open to question, what of his rather vague avowals of belief in a personal God and in the immortality of the soul? Herndon and some of his other close friends always maintained that he was an atheist, but Dr. Barton argues that this atheism was simply disbelief in the idiotic Wesleyan dogmas of his time – that nine Christian churches out of ten, if he were alive to-day, would admit him to their high privileges and prerogatives without anything worse than a few warning coughs. As for me, I still wonder.

The growth of the Lincoln legend is truly amazing. He becomes the American solar myth, the chief butt of American credulity and sentimentality. Washington, of late years, has been perceptibly humanized; every school-boy now knows that he used to swear a good deal, and was a sharp trader, and had a quick eye for a pretty ankle. But meanwhile the varnishers and veneerers have been busily converting Abe into a plaster saint, thus making him fit for adoration in the chautauquas and Y.M.C.A.'s. All the popular American pictures of him show him in his robes of state, and wearing an expression fit for a man about to be hanged. There is, so far as I know, not a single portrait of him showing him smiling – and yet he must have cackled a good deal, first and last: whoever heard of a storyteller who didn't? Worse, there is an obvious effort to pump all his human weaknesses out of him, and so leave him a mere moral apparition, a sort of amalgam of John Wesley and the Holy Ghost. What could be more

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absurd? Lincoln, in point of fact, was a practical politician of long experience and high talents, and by no means cursed with inconvenient ideals. On the contrary, his career in the Illinois Legislature was that of what Americans call a good organization man, and he was more than once denounced by reformers. Even his handling of the slavery question was that of a politician, not that of a fanatic. Nothing alarmed him more than the suspicion that he was an Abolitionist. Barton tells of an occasion when he actually fled the town to avoid meeting the issue squarely. A genuine Abolitionist would have published the Emancipation Proclamation the day after the first battle of Bull Run. But Lincoln waited until the time was more favourable – until Lee had been hurled out of Pennsylvania, and, more important still, until the political currents were safely running his way. Always he was a wary fellow, both in his dealings with measures and in his dealings with men. He knew how to keep his mouth shut.

Nevertheless, it was his eloquence that probably brought him to his great estate. Like William Jennings Bryan, he was an obscure man made suddenly formidable by fortunate rhetoric. The Douglas debate launched him, and the Cooper Union speech got him the presidency. This talent for emotional utterance, this gift for making phrases that enchanted the American people, was an accomplishment of late growth. His early speeches were mere empty fireworks – the childish rodomontades of the era of spittoons and tall talk. But in middle life he purged his style of ornament and it became almost baldly simple – and it is for that simplicity that he is remembered

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to-day. The Gettysburg speech is at once and the shortest the most famous oration in American history. Put beside it, all the whoopings of the Websters, Sumners and Everetts seem gaudy and silly. It is eloquence brought to a pellucid and almost childlike perfection – the highest emotion reduced to one graceful and irresistible gesture. Nothing else precisely like it is to be found in the whole range of oratory. Lincoln himself never even remotely approached it. It is genuinely stupendous.

But let us not forget that it is oratory, not logic; beauty, not sense. Think of the argument in it! Put it into the cold words of every day! The doctrine is simply this: that the Northern soldiers who died at Gettysburg sacrificed their lives to the cause of self-determination – ‘that government of the people, by the people, for the people,’ should not perish from the earth. It is difficult to imagine anything more untrue. The Northern soldiers in that battle actually fought against self-determination; it was the Confederates who fought for the right of their people to govern themselves. What was the practical effect of the battle of Gettysburg? What else than the destruction of the old sovereignty of the States, *i.e.*, of the people of the States? The Confederates went into battle an absolutely free people; they came out with their freedom subject to the supervision and vote of the rest of the country – and for nearly twenty years that vote was so effective that they enjoyed scarcely any freedom at all. Am I the first American to note the fundamental nonsensicality of the Gettysburg address? If so, I plead my æsthetic joy in it in amelioration of the sacrilege.

CHAPTER IX
FIVE AMERICANS

§ 1. *Joseph Hergesheimer*

THIS gentleman, like the late Joseph Conrad, has been slated very waspishly because his English is sometimes in contempt of Lindley Murray. Once, a few years back, a grammarian writing in the *New Republic* formally excommunicated him for it. A number of his offending locutions were cited, all of them, it must be admitted, instantly recognizable as pathological and against God by any schoolmistress. *Soit!* The plain truth is that Hergesheimer, when it comes to the ultimate delicacies of English grammar, is an ignoramus, as he is when it comes to the niceties of Swedenborgian theology. I doubt whether he could tell a noun in the nominative case from a noun in the objective. But neither could any other man who writes as well as he does. Such esoteric knowledge is the exclusive possession of grammarians, whose pride in it runs a direct ratio to its inaccuracy, unimportance and imbecility. English grammar as a science thus takes its place with phrenology and psychical research: the more a grammarian knows of it, the less he is worth listening to. Mastering such blowsy nonsense is one thing, and writing sound English is quite another thing, and the two achievements seem to be impossible to the same man. As Anatole France once remarked, nearly all first-rate writers write 'bad French' — or 'bad English.' Joseph Conrad did. France himself did. Henry James did. Dickens did. Shakespeare did. Thus Hergesheimer need not repine. He is sinful, but in good company. He writes English

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that is 'bad,' but also English that is curiously musical, fluent, chromatic, various and caressing. There is in even the worst of his *Saturday Evening Post* novelettes for Main Street a fine feeling for the inner savour of words – a keen ear for their subtler and more fragile harmonies. In *Cytherea*, which I like beyond all his works – even beyond *The Three Black Pennys* and *Java Head* – they are handled in so adept and ingenious a way, with so much delicacy and originality, that it is no wonder they offer an intolerable affront to pedagogues.

This novel, as I say, seems to me to be the best that Hergesheimer has yet done. His best writing is in it, and his best observation. What interests him fundamentally is the conflict between the natural impulses of men and women and the conventions of the society that they are parts of. The struggles he depicts are not between heroes and villains, dukes and honest toilers, patriots and spies, but between the desire to be happy and the desire to be respected. It is, perhaps, a tribute to the sly humour of God that whichever way the battle goes, the result is bound to be disastrous to the man himself. If, seeking happiness in a world that is jealous of it and so frowns upon it, he sacrifices the good-will of his fellow-men, he always finds in the end that happiness is not happiness at all without it. And if, grabbing the other horn of the dilemma, he sacrifices the free play of his instincts to the respect of those fellow-men, he finds that he has also sacrificed his respect for himself. Hergesheimer is no seer. He does not presume to solve the problem; he merely states it with agreeable variations and in the light

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of a compassionate irony. In *Cytherea*, it takes the ancient form of the sexual triangle – old material, but here treated, despite the underlying scepticism, with a new illumination. What we are asked to observe is a marriage in which all the customary causes follow instead of precede their customary effects. To the eye of the world, and even, perhaps, to the eye of the secondary figures in it, the Randon-Grove affair is no more than a standard-model adultery, orthodox in its origin and in its course. Lee Randon, with an amiable and faithful wife, Fanny, at home at Eastlake, Pa., a region of charming country-houses, with two charming children at her knee, goes to the hell-hole known as New York, falls in love with the sinister Mrs. Savina Grove, and forthwith bolts with her to Cuba, there to encounter a just retribution in the form of her grotesque death. But that is precisely what does *not* happen – that is interiorly. Savina actually has little more to do with the flight of Randon than the Pullman carriage which hauls him southward. It is already inevitable when he leaves Eastlake for New York, almost unaware of her existence. Its springs are to be sought in the very normality that it so profoundly outrages. He is the victim, like Fanny, his wife, of a marriage that has turned upon and devoured itself.

Hergesheimer was never more convincing than in his anatomizing of this *débâcle*. He is too impatient, and perhaps too fine an artist, to do it in the conventional realistic manner of piling up small detail. Instead he launches into it with a bold sagittal section, and at once the play of forces becomes comprehensible. What ails

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Randon, in brief, is that he has a wife who is a shade too good. Beautiful, dutiful, amiable, virtuous, yes. But not provocative enough – not sufficient the lady of scarlet in the chemise of snowy white. Worse, a touch of stupid blindness is in her: she can see the honest business man, but she can't see the romantic lurking within him. When Randon, at a dance, sits out the jazz with some flashy houri on the stairs, all that Fanny can see in it is a vulgar matter, like kissing a housemaid behind the door. Even when Randon brings home the doll, Cytherea, and gives it a place of honour in their house, and begins mooning over it strangely, she is unable to account for the business in any terms save those of transient silliness. The truth is that Cytherea is to Randon what La Belle Ettarre is to Cabell's Felix Kennaston – his altar-flame in a dun world, his visualization of the unattainable, his symbol of what might have been. In her presence he communes secretly with the outlaw hidden beneath the chairman of companies and committees, the gipsy concealed in the sound Americano. One day, bent upon God's work (specifically, upon breaking up a nefarious affair between a neighbour and a cinema lady), he encounters the aforesaid Savina Grove, accidentally brushes her patella with his own, gets an incandescent glare in return, discovers to his horror that she is the living image of Cytherea – and ten days later is aboard the Key West Express with her, bound for San Cristobal de la Habana, and the fires eternal.

A matter, fundamentally, of coincidence. Savina, too, has her Cytherea, though not projected into a doll. She

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too has toiled up the long slope of a flabby marriage, and come at last to the high crags where the air is thin, and a sudden giddiness may be looked for. To call the thing a love affair, in the ordinary sense, is rather fantastic; its very endearments are forced and mawkish. What Randon wants is not more love, but an escape from the bonds and penalties of love – a leap into pure adventure. And what Savina wants, as she very frankly confesses, is the same thing. If a concrete lover must go with it, then that lover must be everything that the decorous William Loyd Grove is not – violent, exigent, savage, inordinate, even a bit gross. I doubt that Savina gets her wish any more than Randon gets his. Good American business men make but indifferent Grand Turks, even when they are in revolt: it is the tragedy of American civilization. And there is no deliverance from the bonds of habit and appearance, even with a mistress. Ten days after he reaches Havana, Randon is almost as securely married as he was at Eastlake. Worse, Eastlake itself reaches out its long arm and begins to punish him, and Savina with him. The conventions of Christendom, alas, are not to be spat upon. Far back in the Cuban hinterland, in a squalid little sugar town, it is a photograph of Fanny that gives a final touch of gruesomeness to the drama of Randon and Savina. There, overtaken in her sin by that banal likeness of the enemy she has never seen, she dies her preposterous death. An ending profoundly ironical. A curtain that gives a final touch of macabre humour to a tale that, from first to last, is full of the spirit of high comedy. Hergesheimer never devised

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one more sardonically amusing, and he never told one with greater skill.

The American and English reviewers, contemplating it, were shocked by his hedonism in trivialities – his unctuous manner of recording the flavour of a drink, the sheen of a fabric, the set of a skirt, the furnishings of a room. In all that, I suppose, they saw something Babylonish, and against God. But this hedonism is really as essential a part of Hergesheimer as moral purpose is part of a Puritan. He looks upon the world, not as a trial of virtue, but as a beautiful experience – in part, indeed, as a downright voluptuous experience. If it is elevating to the soul to observe the fine colours of a sunset, then why is it not quite as elevating to observe the fine colours of a woman's hair, the silk of her frock, a piece of old mahogany, a Martini cocktail? Here it is not actually Hergesheimer's delight in beauty that gives offence, but his inability to differentiate between the beauty that is also the good and the true, and the beauty that is simply beauty. As for me, I incline to go with him in his heresy. It constitutes a valuable antidote to the moral obsession which still hangs over American letters, despite the collapse of the Puritan *Kultur*. It still seems a bit foreign and bizarre, but that is because American literature has yet to achieve a complete emancipation from the Wesleyan theology. In *Cytherea*, as in *Java Head*, it gives a warm and exotic glow to the narrative. That narrative is always recounted, not by a moralist, but by an artist. He knows how to give an episode colour and reality by the artful use of words and the images that they bring up – how to manage

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the *tempo*, the play of light, the surrounding harmonies. This investiture is always as much a part of his story as his tale itself. So is his style, so abhorrent to grammarians. When he writes a sentence that is a bit artificial and complex, it is because he is describing something that is itself a bit artificial and complex. When he varies his rhythms suddenly and sharply, it is not because he is unable to write in the monotonous sing-song of a leader-writer, but because he doesn't want to write that way. Whatever such a man writes is *ipso facto* good English. It is not for pedagogues to criticize it, but to try to comprehend it and teach it. The delusion to the contrary is the cause of much folly.

§ 2. *Ring Lardner*

A few years ago a young American don, eager to make a name for himself, brought out a laborious 'critical' edition of *Sam Slick*, by Judge Thomas C. Haliburton, eighty-seven years after its first publication. It turned out to be quite unreadable — a dreadful series of archaic jocosities about varieties of *Homo americanus* long perished and forgotten, in a dialect now intelligible only to paleophilologists. Sometimes I have a fear that the same fate awaits Ring Lardner. The American pedants of his own day, of course, are quite unaware of him, save perhaps as a low zany to be enjoyed behind the door. They would no more venture to whoop him up publicly and officially than their predecessors of 1880 would have ventured to whoop up Mark Twain, or their remoter predecessors of 1837 would have dared to say anything

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for Haliburton. In such matters, the academic mind, being chiefly animated by a fear of sneers, works very slowly. So slowly, indeed, does it work that it usually works too late. By the time Mark Twain got into the textbooks two-thirds of his compositions, as the Young Intellectuals say, had already begun to date; by the time Haliburton was served up as a sandwich between introduction and notes he was already dead. As I say, I suspect sadly that Lardner is doomed to go the same route. His stories, it seems to me, are superbly adroit and amusing; no other contemporary American, sober or gay, writes better. But I doubt that they last: the grandchildren of his contemporaries will wonder what they are about. It is not only, or even mainly, that the dialect that fills them will pass, though that fact is obviously a serious handicap in itself. It is principally that the people they depict will pass, that Lardner's Low Down Americans – his incomparable baseball players, pugilists, song-writers, Elks, cinema stars, small-town Rotarians and golf caddies – are flitting figures of a transient civilization, and doomed to be as puzzling and soporific, in the year 2000, as Haliburton's Yankee clock pedlar is to-day.

The fact – if I may assume it to be a fact – is certain not to be set against Lardner's account; on the contrary, it is, in its way, highly complimentary to him. For he has deliberately applied himself, not to the anatomizing of the general human soul, but to the meticulous histological study of a few salient individuals of his time and nation, and he has done it with such subtle and penetrating skill that one must belong to his time and nation to follow

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him. I doubt that anyone who is not familiar with professional ball players, intimately and at first-hand, will ever comprehend the full merit of the amazing sketches in *You Know Me, Al*; I doubt that anyone who has not given close and deliberate attention to the American vulgate will ever realize how magnificently Lardner handles it. He has had more imitators, I suppose, than any other living American writer, but has he any actual rivals? If so, I have yet to hear of them. They all try to write the speech of the streets as adeptly and as amusingly as he writes it, and they all fall short of him; the next best is miles and miles behind him. And they are all inferior in observation, in sense of character, in shrewdness and insight. His studies, to be sure, are never very profound; he makes no attempt to get at the primary springs of human motive; all his people share the same amiable stupidity, the same transparent vanity, the same shallow swinishness; they are all human Fords in bad repair, and alike at bottom. But if he thus confines himself to the surface, it yet remains a fact that his investigations on that surface are extraordinarily alert, ingenious and brilliant — that the character he finally sets before us, however roughly articulated as to bones, is so astoundingly realistic as to epidermis that the effect is indistinguishable from that of life itself. The old man in *The Golden Honeymoon* is not merely well done: he is perfect. And so is the girl in *Some Like Them Cold*. And so, even, is the idiotic Frank X. Farrell in *Alibi Ike* — an extravagant grotesque and yet quite real from glabella to calcaneus.

Lardner knows more about the management of the

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short story than nine-tenths of its eminent virtuosi. His stories are built very carefully, and yet they seem to be wholly spontaneous, and even formless. He has grasped the primary fact that no conceivable ingenuity can save a story that fails to show a recognizable and interesting character; he knows that a good character sketch is always a good story, no matter what its structure. Perhaps he gets less attention than he ought to get, even among the anti-academic American critics, because his people are all lowly boors. For your American reviewer of books, like every other sort of American, is always vastly impressed by fashionable pretensions. He belongs to the white-collar class of labour, and shares its prejudices. He praises F. Scott Fitzgerald's stories of country-club flappers eloquently, and overlooks Fitzgerald's other stories, most of which are much better. He can't rid himself of the feeling that Edith Wharton, whose people have butlers, is a better novelist than Willa Cather, whose people, in the main, dine in their kitchens. He lingers under the spell of Henry James, whose most humble character, at any rate of the later years, was at least an Englishman, and hence superior. Lardner, so to speak, hits such critics under the belt. He not only fills his stories with people who read the illustrated papers, say 'Shake hands with my friend,' and buy diamond rings: he also shows them having a good time in the world, and quite devoid of inferiority complexes. They amuse him sardonically, but he does not pity them. A fatal error! The half-wit, perhaps, has a place in fiction, as in life, but he is not to be treated too easily and casually.

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It must be shown that he suffers tragically because he cannot abandon the plough to write poetry, or the bagman's art and mystery to study for opera. Lardner is more realistic. If his typical hero has a secret sorrow it is that he is too old to take up osteopathy and too much in dread of his wife to venture into bootlegging.

Of late a sharply acrid flavour has got into Lardner's buffoonery. His baseball players and fifth-rate pugilists, beginning in his first stories as harmless dolts, gradually convert themselves into loathsome scoundrels. The same change shows itself in Sinclair Lewis, as *Elmer Gantry* witnesses; it is difficult, even for an American, to contemplate the American without yielding to something hard to distinguish from moral indignation. Turn, for example, to the sketches in the volume called *The Love Nest*. The first tells the story of a cinema queen married to a magnate of the films. On the surface she seems to be nothing but a noodle, but underneath there is a sewer; the woman is such a pig that she makes one shudder. Again, he investigates another familiar type: the village practical joker. The fellow, in one form or other, has been laughed at since the days of Aristophanes. But here is a mercilessly realistic examination of his dunghill humour, and of its effects upon decent people. A third figure is a successful theatrical manager: he turns out to have the professional competence of a quack dentist, and the honour of a Prohibition agent. A fourth is a writer of popular songs: stealing other men's ideas has become so fixed a habit with him that he comes to believe that he has an actual right to them. A fifth is a hospital

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nurse — but I spare you this dreadful nurse. The rest are bores of the homicidal type. One gets the effect, communing with the whole gang, of visiting a museum of anatomy. They are as shocking as what one encounters there — but in every detail they are as unmistakably real.

Lardner conceals his new savagery, of course, beneath his old humour. It does not flag. No man writing in the United States has greater skill at the more extravagant varieties of jocosity. He sees a startling and revelatory likeness between immensely disparate things, and he is full of pawky observations and bizarre comments. Two professional baseball-players are palavering, and one of them, Young Jake, is boasting of his conquests during spring practice in the Southern States. 'Down South ain't here!' replies the other. 'Those dames in some of those swamps, they lose their head when they see a man with shoes on!' The two proceed to the discussion of a third imbecile, guilty of some obscure tort. 'Why,' inquires Young Jake, 'didn't you break his nose or bust him in the chin?' 'His nose was already broke,' replied the other, 'and he didn't have no chin.' Such lowly witticisms seem easy to devise. New York diverts itself by manufacturing them. They constitute the substance of half the town shows. But in those made by Lardner there is something far more than mere facile humour: they are all rigidly in character, and they illuminate that character. Few American novelists, great or small, have character more firmly in hand. Lardner does not see situations: he sees people. And what people! They

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are all as revolting as so many Methodist evangelists, and they are all as thoroughly American.

§ 3. *Edgar Lee Masters*

The case of Masters remains mysterious; more, even, than Sherwood Anderson, his fellow-fugitive from a Chicago in decay, he presents an enigma to the prayerful critic. On the one hand there stands *The Spoon River Anthology*, unquestionably the most eloquent, the most profound and the most thoroughly national volume of poetry published in American since *Leaves of Grass*; on the other hand stands a great mass of feeble doggerel – imitations of Byron, of Browning, of Lowell, of George H. Boker, of all the bad poets since the dawn of the nineteenth century. Of late he turns to prose, and with results almost as confusing. In all of his books there are fine touches, and in one of them, *Mitch Miller*, there are many of them. But in all of them there are also banalities so crass and so vast that it is almost impossible to imagine a literate man letting them go by. Consider, for example, the novel *Mirage*. It seems to me to be one of the most idiotic and yet one of the most interesting American novels that I have ever read. Whole pages of it are given over to philosophical discussions that recall nothing so much as the palavers of neighbouring barbers between clients, and yet they are intermingled with observations that are shrewd and sound, and that are set forth with excellent grace and no little eloquence. Some of the characters in the book are mere stuffed dummies, creaking in every joint; others stand out as brilliantly alive as the

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people of Dreiser or Miss Cather. My suspicion is that there are actually two Masterses, that the man is a sort of literary diplococcus. At his worst, he is intolerably affected, arty and artificial. At his best he probably gets nearer to the essential truth about American civilization than any other contemporary literatus.

Mirage, I dare say, is already forgotten, though it was published only in 1924. In substance, it is the story of Skeeters Kirby's quest for the Wonder Woman that all sentimentalists seek, and that none of them finds until drink has brought him to his death-bed, and he sees the fat, affable nurse through a purple haze. Skeeters comes from the town of Mitch Miller, and when we first encounter him he is a lawyer in Chicago. Already the search for the Perfect Doll has begun to leave scars upon his psyche. First there was the sweet one who died before he could get her to the altar; then there was the naughty Alicia, his lawful wife, but, as he would say himself, a lemon. As the story opens, Alicia, divorcing him, has just blackmailed him out of \$70,000, almost his whole fortune, as the price of her silence about Mrs. Becky Morris. Becky is the widow of a rich old man, and now enjoys the usufruct of his tenements and hereditaments. She has red hair and a charming manner, and is a great liar. She falsely pretends to have read Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*, and passes in her circle as an intellectual on the strength of it. She tells Skeeters that she is virtuous, or, rather, that she *has* been virtuous, and all the while she is carrying on an affair with one Delaher, a handsome frequenter of the Hotel Ritzdorf

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in New York. A saucy and poisonous baggage, this Becky, but Skeeters falls violently in love with her, and gladly pays Alicia the \$70,000 in order to protect her from scandal. But then she leaves him, writes him a letter of farewell, and refuses flatly to marry him, and when he pursues her to New York, confronts her with her adulteries, and throws up to her the fact that he has gone bankrupt for her, she requites him only with a dreadful slanging. I quote the exact text:

Kirby took a drink of brandy from the flask and came to her, taking her in his arms. 'Tell me, dear, what shall we do? Are we engaged?'

Becky shook her head.

'What do you wish? Shall I treat you as my bride-to-be, or shall we go on as we are now?'

'Go on as we are now!'

'You know I am free now – and it cost me, too, to be free.'

'How much?'

'Seventy thousand dollars.'

'That's not much.'

'It's practically all I have.'

'Well, *Alicia won't have such a large income out of it.*'

'And I paid it for you.'

Becky opened her eyes. Her face became a bonfire of rage. Her red hair bristled like a wild animal's.

'You're just a liar to say that! And you can't say such things in my room. This is my room; *I pay for it. And you can be respectful to me here, or you can go.*'

Kirby did not betray his anger. He concentrated it and went on: '*I beg your pardon.*'

In a voice as soft as oil he asked:

'Did you see Delaher?'

'Yes, I did, and he's a rough-neck.' [I.e., a rough, crude fellow.]

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‘Well?’

‘None of your business!’

‘None of my business, eh?’ Kirby said, with a bitter intonation.

‘Leave my room,’ Becky said.

‘No, I’ll not leave your room.’

‘*I’ll have you put out.*’

‘You don’t dare, Becky – you don’t dare!’ . . .

Two pages more of this, and then Becky breaks out grandly:

‘What do you want, anyway? You have had everything I have to give: my hospitality, *my bread, my wine, my couch, my affection, gift-tokens of my love* – what do you want?’

Kirby explains that he wants a wife and a soul-mate – ‘a mind to be the companion of my mind.’ But Becky refuses to marry him. Instead she goes to her bedroom and then returns with Kirby’s letters:

‘Here are your letters. You’ve stayed and had your say out. And now that you’ve said it, you can see for yourself that *you have no case against me* . . . Here are your letters.’

‘I don’t want them.’

‘Very well, I’ll tear them up.’

She proceeded to do so.

‘*Now all the evidence is destroyed,*’ he said.

I have thrown in a few italics to point the high spots of this singular colloquy. It goes on for page after page, and the whole book is filled with dialogues like it. What is one to make of such inconceivable banality? Is there worse in Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*? But Masters, you may say, is trying to depict eighth-rate people – frequenters of night-clubs, dubious hangers-on upon the

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edges of intelligence and decency – and that is how they actually talk. It may be so, but I note at once two objections to that defence. The first is that Masters does not appear to regard Kirby as eighth-rate; on the contrary, he takes the fellow's moony drabbing quite seriously, and even tries to get a touch of the tragic into it. The second is that precisely the same hollow and meaningless fustian often appears when the author speaks in his own person. The way he tells his story is almost precisely the way it would be told by a somewhat intellectual bagman in an hotel smoke-room. Its approach to the eternal sex question, its central theme, is exactly that of such a gentleman; its very phrases, in the main, are his phrases. He actually appears, in fact, as a sort of chorus to the drama, under the name of Bob Haydon. Bob, facing disillusion and death, favours Kirby with many cantos of philosophy. Their general burden is that the prudent man, having marked a sweet one to his taste, uses her person to his wicked ends, and then kicks her out. Kirby's agonies do not move Bob, and neither do they bore him. 'Bore me!' he exclaims. 'This is better than a circus!'

As I say, I have also enjoyed it myself. It is not, indeed, without its flashes of genuine sagacity; even Bob's stock-broker view of the sexual duel, given such a male as Kirby and such females as Becky, is probably more sound than not. But the chief fascination of the story, I am bound to say, lies in its very deficiencies as a human document and a work of art – in its naïve lack of humour, its elaborate labouring of the obvious, its incredible stiltedness and triteness. There are passages that actually suggest Daisy

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Ashford. For example: 'She was biting her nails while talking to Delaher, and biting them after he left. *Then she put on white cotton gloves to prevent this nervous habit.*' Again (Kirby has abandoned Becky for another girl, Charlotte, formerly his typist):

'*May I say something to you?*' she whispered at last.

'What is it, Charlotte?'

'I want a child, and a child with you.'

Somehow, this 'May I say something to you?' gives me vast delight: the respectful politeness of the perfect secretary surviving into the most confidential of moments! No such child is achieved – Charlotte, in fact, dies before it can be born – and so we miss her courteous request for permission to name it after its father. But she and Kirby, alas, sin the sin, and what is worse, they sin it under his mother's roof. What is still worse, they do it with her knowledge and connivance. She is greatly taken, in fact, with Charlotte, and advises Kirby to marry her. I quote her argument:

'If Byron had mistresses, he was also a rider and a fencer and a poet; and if Webster may have been a drinker, he was great as a lawyer and a speaker. If Charlotte has had extra-marital relationships, she is a capable housekeeper, a good secretary, a woman skilled in many things, and she has all kinds of virtues, like humour and self-control, and the spirit of happiness, and an essential honesty.'

I leave the rest to posterity! What will it make of Masters as novelist? When it turns from the heroic and lovely lines of *Ann Rutledge* to the astounding banalities of *Mirage*, what will it say?

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§ 4. *Madison Cawein*

A vast and hefty tome celebrates this dead American poet, solemnly issued by his mourning friends in Louisville. The editor is one Otto A. Rothert, who confesses that he knew Cawein but a year or two, and never read his poetry until after his death. The contributors include such backwoods *literati* as Reuben Post Halleck, Leigh Gordon Giltner, Anna Blanche McGill, and Elvira S. Miller Slaughter. Most of the ladies gush over the departed in the manner of intellectual curates paying tribute to Plato, Montaigne, or Dante Alighieri. But it is a fascinating volume, all the same, and well worth the room it takes on the shelf. Mr. Rothert starts off with what he calls a 'picturography' of Cawein — the poet's father and mother in the raiment of 1865, the coat-of-arms of his mother's great-grandfather's uncle, the house which now stands on the site of the house in which he was born, the spring from which he used to drink as a boy, a group showing him with his three brothers, another showing him with one brother and their cousin Fred, Cawein himself with whiskers, the houses he lived in, the place where he worked, the walks he liked around Louisville, his wife and baby, the hideous bust of him in the Louisville Public Library, the church from which he was buried, his modest grave in Cave Hill Cemetery — in brief, all the photographs that collect about a man as he staggers through life, and entertain his ribald grandchildren after he is gone. Then comes a treatise on the ancestry and youth of the poet, then a collection of news-

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paper cuttings about him, then a gruesomely particular account of his death, then a fragment of autobiography, then a selection from his singularly dull letters, then some prose pieces from his pen, then the aforesaid tributes of his neighbours, and finally a bibliography of his works, and an index to them.

As I say, a volume of fearful bulk and beam, but nevertheless full of curious and interesting things. Cawein, of course, was not a poet of the first rank, nor is it certain that he has any secure place in the second rank, but in the midst of a great deal of obvious and feeble stuff he undoubtedly wrote some nature lyrics of excellent quality. The woods and the fields were his delight. He loved to roam through them, observing the flowers, the birds, the tall trees, the shining sky overhead, the green of spring, the reds and browns of autumn, the still whites of winter. There were times when he got his ecstasy into words – when he wrote poems that were sound and beautiful. These poems will not be forgotten; there will be no history of American literature written for a hundred years that does not mention Madison Cawein. But what will the literary historians make of the man himself? How will they explain his possession, however fitfully, of the divine gift – his genuine kinship with Wordsworth and Shelley? Certainly no more unlikely candidate for the bays every shinned up Parnassus. His father was a quack doctor; his mother was a professional spiritualist; he himself, for years and years, made a living as cashier in a gambling-house! Could anything be more grotesque? Is it possible to imagine a more improbable setting

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for a poet? Yet the facts are the facts, and Mr. Rothert makes no attempt whatever to conceal them. Add a final touch of the bizarre: Cawein fell over one morning while shaving in his bath, and cracked his head on the tub, and after his death there was a row over his life assurance. Mr. Rothert presents all of the documents. The autopsy is described; the death certificate is quoted. . . . A strange, strange tale, indeed!

§ 5. *Jack London*

The quasi-science of genealogy, as it is practised in the United States, is directed almost exclusively toward establishing aristocratic descents for nobodies. That is to say, it records and glorifies decay. Its typical masterpiece is the discovery that the wife of some obscure country judge in Ohio or Vermont is the grandchild, infinitely removed, of Mary Queen of Scots, or that the blood of Geoffrey of Monmouth flows in the veins of a Philadelphia stockbroker. How much more profitably its professors might be employed in tracing the lineage of truly salient and distinguished men! For example, the late Jack London. Where did he get his hot artistic passion, his delicate feeling for form and colour, his extraordinary skill with words? The man, in truth, was an instinctive artist of a high order, and if ignorance often corrupted his art, it only made the fact of his inborn mastery the more remarkable. No other popular American writer of his time did any better writing than you will find in *The Call of the Wild*, or in parts of *John Barleycorn*, or in such short stories as *The Sea Farmer* and *Samuel*.

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Here, indeed, are all the elements of sound fiction: clear thinking, a sense of character, the dramatic instinct, and, above all, the adept putting together of words – words charming and slyly significant, words arranged, in a French phrase, for the respiration and the ear. You will never convince me that this æsthetic sensitiveness, so rare, so precious, so distinctively aristocratic, burst into a biogenetic flower on a San Francisco sand-lot. There must have been some intrusion of an alien and superior strain, some *pianissimo* fill-up from above; there was obviously a great deal more to the thing than a routine hatching in low life. Perhaps the explanation is to be sought in a Jewish smear. Jews were not few in the California of half a century ago, and one of them, at least, attained to a certain high, if transient, fame with the pen. Moreover, the name, London, has a Jewish smack; the Jews like to call themselves after great cities. I have, indeed, heard this possibility of an Old Testament descent put into an actual rumour. Stranger genealogies are not unknown in seaports. . . .

But London the artist did not live *a cappella*. There was also London the amateur Great Thinker, and the second often hamstrung the first. That great thinking of his, of course, took colour from the sordid misery of his early life; it was, in the main, a youthful Socialism, wholly uncriticized by humour. Some of his propagandist and expository books are almost unbelievably nonsensical, and whenever he allowed any of his so-called ideas to sneak into an imaginative work the intrusion promptly spoiled it. Socialism, in truth, is quite incompatible with art;

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its fried-fish shop materialism is fundamentally at war with the first principle of the æsthetic gospel, which is that one daffodil is worth ten shares of Bethlehem Steel. It is not by accident that there has never been a book on Socialism which was also a work of art. Papa Marx's *Das Kapital* at once comes to mind. It is as wholly devoid of graces as *The Origin of Species* or *Science and Health*; one simply cannot conceive a reasonable man reading it without aversion; it is as revolting as a barrel-organ. London, preaching Socialism, or quasi-Socialism, or whatever it was that he preached, took over this offensive dullness. The materialistic conception of history was too heavy a load for him to carry. When he would create beautiful books he had to throw it overboard as Wagner threw overboard democracy, the superman and free thought. A sort of temporary Christian created *Parsifal*. A sort of temporary aristocrat created *The Call of the Wild*.

Also in another way London's early absorption of social and economic nostrums damaged him as an artist. It led him into a socialistic exaltation of mere money; it put a touch of avarice into him. Hence his too deadly industry, his relentless thousand words a day, his steady emission of half-done books. The prophet of freedom, he yet sold himself into slavery to the publishers, and paid off with his soul for his ranch, his horses, his trappings of a wealthy cheesemonger. His volumes rolled out almost as fast as those of E. Phillips Oppenheim; he simply could not make them perfect at such a gait. There are books on his list — for example, *The Scarlet Plague*

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and *The Little Lady of the Big House* – that are little more than garrulous notes for books.

But even in the worst of them one comes upon sudden splashes of brilliant colour, stray proofs of the adept penman, half-wistful reminders that London, at bottom, was no fraud. He left enough, I am convinced, to keep him in mind. There was in him a vast delicacy of perception, a high feeling, a sensitiveness to beauty. And there was in him, too, under all his blatancies, a poignant sense of the infinite romance and mystery of human life.

CHAPTER X
LITERARY NOTES

§ I. *On Authors*

IF authors could work in large, well-ventilated factories, with plenty of their mates about and a flow of lively professional gossip to entertain them, their labour would be immensely lighter. But it is essential to their craft that they perform its tedious and vexatious operations *a cappella*, and so the horrors of loneliness are added to its other unpleasantnesses. An author at work is continuously and inescapably in the presence of himself. There is nothing to divert and soothe him. So every time a vagrant regret or sorrow assails him, it has him instantly by the ear, and every time a wandering ache runs down his leg it shakes him like the bite of a tiger. I have yet to meet an author who was not a hypochondriac. Saving only physicians, who are always ill and in fear of death, the *literati* are perhaps the most lavish consumers of pills and philtres in this world, and the most willing customers of surgeons. I can scarcely think of one, known to me personally, who is not constantly dosing himself with medicines, or regularly resorting to the knife. At the head of the craft stand men who are even more celebrated as invalids than they are as authors. I know of one who —

But perhaps I had better avoid invading what, after all, may be private confidences, though they are certainly not imparted in confidential tones. The point is that an author, penned in a room during all his working hours with no company save his own, is bound to be more conscious than other men of the petty malaises that assail all

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of us. They tackle him, so to speak, in a vacuum; he can't seek diversion from them without at the same time suffering diversion from his work. And what they leave of him is tortured and demoralized by wayward and uncomfortable thoughts. It must be obvious that other men, even among the *intelligentsia*, are not beset so cruelly. A judge on the bench, entertaining a ringing in the ears, can do his work almost as well as if he heard only the voluptuous rhetoric of the lawyers. A clergyman, carrying on his degraded mummery, is not appreciably crippled by a sour stomach: what he says has been said before, and only scoundrels question it. And a surgeon, plying his exhilarating art and mystery, suffers no professional damage from the wild thought that the attending nurse is more sightly than his wife. But I defy anyone to write a competent sonnet with a ringing in his ears, or to compose sound criticism with a sour stomach, or to do a plausible love scene with a head full of private amorous fancies. These things are sheer impossibilities. The poor *literatus* encounters them and their like every time he enters his work-room and rosins his hands. The moment the door bangs he begins a depressing, losing struggle with his body and his mind.

Why, then, do rational men and women engage in so barbarous and exhausting a vocation — for there are relatively intelligent and enlightened authors, remember, just as there are relatively honest politicians, and even bishops. What keeps them from deserting it for trades that are less onerous, and, in the eyes of their fellow-creatures, more respectable? The first, and perhaps the foremost,

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reason I have exposed at length in another place: the thing pays. But there is another, and it ought to be heard too. It lies, I believe, in the fact that an author, like any other so-called artist, is a man in whom the normal vanity of all men is so vastly exaggerated that he finds it a sheer impossibility to hold it in. His overpowering impulse is to gyrate before his fellow-men, flapping his wings and emitting defiant yells. This being forbidden by the police of all civilized countries, he takes it out by putting his yells on paper. Such is the thing called self-expression.

In the confidences of the *litterati*, of course, it is always depicted as something much more mellow and virtuous. Either they argue that they are moved by a yearning to spread the enlightenment and save the world, or they allege that what steams them and makes them leap is a passion for beauty. Both theories are quickly disposed of by an appeal to the facts. The stuff written by nine authors out of ten, it must be plain at a glance, has as little to do with spreading the enlightenment as the State papers of a colonial Premier. And there is no more beauty in it, and no more sign of a feeling of beauty, than you will find in an hotel lounge or a Nonconformist chapel. The impulse to create beauty, indeed, is rather rare in literary men, and almost completely absent from the younger ones. If it shows itself at all, it comes as a sort of afterthought. Far ahead of it comes the yearning to make money. And after the yearning to make money comes the yearning to make a noise. The impulse to create beauty lingers far behind; not infrequently there is a void where it ought to be. Authors, as a class, are extraordinarily insensitive to beauty, and the

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fact reveals itself in their customary (and often incredibly extensive) ignorance of the other arts. I'd have a hard job naming six novelists who could be depended upon to recognize a fugue without prompting, or six poets who could give a rational account of the difference between a Gothic cathedral and a suburban villa. The thing goes even farther. Most novelists, in my experience, know nothing of poetry, and very few poets have any feeling for the beauties of prose. As for the dramatists, three-fourths of them are unaware that such things as prose and poetry exist at all. It pains me to set down such inconvenient and blushful facts. They will be seized upon, I dare say, by Philistines, and employed to support the doctrine that authors are public enemies, and ought to be deported to Russia. I do not go so far. I simply say that many who pursue the literary life are less romantic and high-toned than they might be — that communion with them is anything but the thrilling thing that provincial club ladies fancy. If the fact ought to be concealed, then blame my babbling upon scientific passion. That passion, to-day, has me by the ear.

§ 2. *On Style*

With precious few exceptions, all the books on style in English are by writers quite unable to write. The subject, indeed, seems to exercise a special and dreadful fascination over schoolmasters and other such pseudo-literates. One never hears of treatises on it by George Moore or Thomas Henry Huxley, but the pedagogues are at it all the time. In solemn texts they set forth their depressing ideas about

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it, and millions of suffering schoolboys have to study what they say. Their central aim, of course, is to reduce the whole thing to a series of simple rules – the overmastering passion of their melancholy order, at all times and everywhere. They aspire to teach it as bridge whist and double-entry bookkeeping are taught. They fail as ignominiously as that Athenian of legend who essayed to train a regiment of grasshoppers in the goose-step.

For the essence of a sound style is that it cannot be reduced to rules – that it is a living and breathing thing, with something of the demonical in it – that it fits its proprietor tightly and yet ever so loosely, as his skin fits him. It is, in fact, quite as securely an integral part of him as that skin is. It hardens as his arteries harden. It has headaches on the days succeeding his indiscretions. It is gaudy when he is young and gathers decorum when he grows old. On the day after he flutters the eyelids of a new girl it glows and glitters. If he has fed well, it is mellow. If he has gastritis, it is bitter. In brief, a style is always the outward and visible symbol of a man, and it cannot be anything else. To attempt to teach it is as silly as to set up courses in making love. The man who makes love out of a book is not making love at all; he is simply imitating someone else making love. God help him if, in love or literary composition, his preceptor be a pedagogue!

The theory that the writing of English may be taught is based upon a faulty inference from a sound observation. The sound observation is that the great majority of the young and tender, when they attempt to put their thoughts upon paper, produce only a mass of confused and puerile

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nonsense – that they express themselves so clumsily that it is often quite impossible to understand them at all. The faulty inference is to the effect that what ails them is a defective technical equipment – that they can be trained to write clearly as a dog may be trained to walk on its hind legs. This is all wrong. What ails them is not a defective technical equipment, but a defective natural equipment. They write badly simply because they cannot think clearly. They cannot think clearly because they lack the brains. Trying to teach them is as hopeless as trying to teach a dog with only one hind leg. Any human being who can speak English understandably has all the materials necessary to write English clearly, and even beautifully. There is nothing mysterious about the written language; it is precisely the same, in essence, as the spoken language. If a man can think in English at all, he can find words enough to express his ideas. The fact is proved abundantly by the excellent writing that often comes from so-called ignorant men. It is proved anew by the even better writing that is done on higher levels by persons of great simplicity, for example, Abraham Lincoln and William Blake. Such writing commonly arouses little enthusiasm among pedagogues. Its transparency excites their professional disdain, and they are offended by its use of homely words and phrases. They prefer something more ornate and complex – something, as they would probably put it, demanding more thought. But the thought they yearn for is the kind, alas, that they secrete themselves – the muddled, vapid thought that one finds in their own textbooks.

I do not denounce them because they write so badly ; I

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merely record the fact in a sad, scientific spirit. Even in such twilight regions of the intellect the style remains the man. What is in the head infallibly oozes out of the nib of the pen. If it is sparkling Burgundy the writing is full of life and charm. If it is porridge the writing is porridge too. The late Dr. Warren Gamaliel Harding, twenty-ninth President of the United States, was a highly self-conscious stylist. He practised prose composition assiduously, and was regarded by the *illuminati* of Marion, Ohio, and vicinity as a very talented fellow. But when he sent a message to Congress it was so muddled in style that even the late Henry Cabot Lodge, a professional literary man, could not understand it. Why? Simply because Dr. Harding's thoughts, on the high and grave subjects he discussed, were so muddled that he couldn't understand them himself. But on matters within his range of customary meditation he was clear, and even charming, as all of us are. I once heard him deliver a brief address upon the ideals of the Elks, a friendly society of which he was an ornament. It was a topic close to his heart, and he had thought about it at length and *con amore*. The result was an excellent speech — clear, logical, forceful, and with a touch of wild, romantic beauty. His sentences hung together. He employed simple words, and put them in their places with skill. But when, at a public meeting in Washington, he essayed to deliver an oration on the subject of the late Dante Alighieri, he quickly became so obscure and absurd that even the Diplomatic Corps began to snigger. The cause was plain: he knew no more about Dante than a Tennessee county judge knows about the Institutes of Justinian. Trying to

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formulate ideas upon the topic, he could get together only a few disjuncted fragments and ghosts of ideas – here an ear, there a section of tibia, beyond a puff of soul substance or other gas. The resultant speech was thus enigmatical, cacophonous and awful stuff. It sounded precisely like a lecture by a schoolmaster on style.

A pedagogue, confronted by Dr. Harding in class, would have set him to the business of what is called improving his vocabulary – that is, to the business of making his writing even worse than it was. Dr. Harding, in point of fact, had all the vocabulary that he needed, and a great deal more. Any idea that he could formulate clearly he could convey clearly. Any idea that genuinely moved him he could invest with charm – which is to say, with what the pedagogues call style. I believe that this capacity is possessed by all literate persons above the age of fourteen. It is not acquired by studying textbooks; it is acquired by learning how to think. Children even younger often show it. I have a niece, now eleven years old, who already has an excellent style. When she writes to me about things that interest her – in other words, about the things she is capable of thinking about – she puts her thoughts into clear, dignified and admirable English. Her vocabulary, so far, is unspoiled by schoolmistresses. She doesn't try to knock me out by bombarding me with hard words, and phrases filched from newspaper leaders. She is unaffected, and hence her writing is charming. But if she essayed to send me a communication on the subject, say, of Balkan politics, her style would descend instantly to the level of that of Dr. Harding's state papers.

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To sum up, style cannot go beyond the ideas which lie at the heart of it. If they are clear, it too will be clear. If they are held passionately, it will be eloquent. Trying to teach it to persons who cannot think, especially when the business is attempted by persons who also cannot think, is a great waste of time. It would be far more logical to devote all the energy to teaching, not writing, but logic – and just as useless. For I doubt that the art of thinking can be taught at all – at any rate, by schoolmasters. It is not acquired, but congenital. Some persons are born with it. Their ideas flow in straight channels; they are capable of lucid reasoning; when they say anything it is instantly understandable; when they write anything it is clear and persuasive. They constitute, I should say, about one-eighth of one per cent. of the human race. The rest of God's children are just as incapable of logical thought as they are incapable of jumping over the moon. Trying to teach them to think is as vain an enterprise as trying to teach an oyster the principles of Liberalism. The only thing to do with them is to make dons of them, and set them to writing handbooks on style.

CHAPTER XI

THE AMERICAN NOVEL

§ I

ON the purely technical side the American novel has made immense progress of late – perhaps more than the English novel, and certainly more than the novel of Germany or France. As ordinarily encountered, it is very adeptly constructed, and not infrequently it is also well written. The amorphous Victorian novel, rambling all over the place and ending with pious platitudes, has pretty well gone out in the Republic; even Theodore Dreiser has begun to give some attention to form and organization. The American novelists of to-day, and especially the younger ones, have devoted earnest study to that subject – perhaps, indeed, too much. For in concentrating their powerful intellects upon it they have lost sight of something that is far more important. I allude, of course, to the observation of character. Thus the average contemporary American novel, though it is workmanlike and well-mannered, fails to achieve its first business. It does not evoke memorable images of human beings. One enjoys reading it, perhaps, but one seldom remembers it. And when it gets beyond the estate of a mere technical exercise, it only too often descends to the even worse estate of a treatise. It attempts to prove something – usually the simple fact that its author is a clever fellow, or a saucy girl. But all a novel of genuine bulk and beam ever proves is that the proper study of mankind is man – the proper study and the most engrossing.

In brief, a first-rate novel is always a character sketch.

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It may be more than that, but at bottom it is always a character sketch, or, if the author is genuinely of the imperial line, a whole series of them. More, it is a character sketch of an individual not far removed from the norm of the race. He may have his flavour of oddity, but he is never fantastic; he never violates the common rules of human action; he never shows emotions that are impossible to the rest of us. If Thackeray had made Becky Sharp seven feet tall, and given her a bass voice, nine husbands, and the rank of lieutenant-general in the Army, she would have been forgotten long ago, along with all the rest of *Vanity Fair*. And if Robinson Crusoe had been an Edison instead of a normal sailorman, he would have gone the same way.

The moral of all this is not lost upon the more competent minority of novelists in practice in the United States. It was not necessary to preach it to Miss Cather when she set out to write *My Antonia*, nor to Abraham Cahan when he tackled *The Rise of David Levinsky*, nor to Sinclair Lewis when he was at work on *Babbitt*. All such novelists see the character first and the story afterward. What is the story of *Babbitt*? Who remembers? Who, indeed, remembers the story of *The Three Musketeers*? But D'Artagnan and his friends live brilliantly, and so, too, I believe, will George F. Babbitt live brilliantly — at all events, until Rotary ceases to trouble the Federal Union and his type ceases to be real. Most of the younger American novelists, alas, seem to draw no profit from such examples. It is their aim, apparently, to shock mankind with the vivacity of their virtuosity and the heterodoxy of

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their ideas, and so they fill their novels with gaudy writing and banal propaganda, and convert their characters into sticks. I read volume after volume of their works without getting any sense of contact with actual human beings. I am, at times, immensely amused, and sometimes I am instructed, but I seldom carry away anything to remember. When I do so, it is not an idea, but a person. Like everyone else, I have a long memory for persons. But ideas come and go.

All this becomes the more remarkable when one considers the peculiar richness of the American scene in sharply outlined and racy characters. The national ideas of the country, indeed, are mainly third-rate, and some of them are almost idiotic, but taking one year with another it probably produces more lively and diverting people than all the rest of the world taken together. More, these lively and diverting people tend to cluster into types. Mark Twain put half a dozen of them into *Huckleberry Finn* and as many more into *Roughing It*, a novel disguised as history. Montague Glass collared a whole flock for his Potash and Perlmutter stories, and Ring Lardner has got another flock into his studies of the American boulder, too little known and esteemed in England. But the younger American novelists, or at least the overwhelming majority of them, stick to their sticks. Thus even the most salient and arresting of American types still lack historians, and seem doomed to perish and be forgotten with the Bill of Rights. Babbitt stood around for a dozen years, waiting for Lewis; the rest of the novelists of the land of bootleggers gaped at him without seeing him. How long will they gape at the

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American politician? At the American university president? At the American policeman? At the American lawyer? At the Prohibition fanatic? At the bootlegger? At the Y.M.C.A. secretary? At the journalist?

§ 2

I have put the politician at the top of my list. He probably embodies more typically American traits than any other; he is, within his limits, the arch-American. Yet how seldom he gets into a novel! And how seldom, having got there, is he real! I can recall, indeed, but one American political novel of any value whatever as a study of character, and that is Harvey Fergusson's story of Washington, *Capitol Hill* — a series of casual sketches, but all of them vivid and true. Fergusson really understands the American politician. There is, in *Capitol Hill*, no division of the *dramatis personæ* between Democrats and Republicans, progressives and reactionaries, materialists and idealists, patriots and traitors; the only division is between men and women who have something, and men and women who want it. In that simple fact lies most of the book's curious reality. For the truth about Washington is that it is not a town of politics, in the conventional and romantic sense; it is, if anything, a town almost devoid of politics. The people in the industrial cities of the eastern United States and out on the farms of the Middle West take political ideas seriously; what they cherish in that department they refuse passionately to surrender. But so far as I know there are not a dozen professional politicians in Washington, high or low, who would not throw overboard, instantly

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and gladly, every political idea they are assumed to be devoted to, including especially every political idea that has helped them into public office, if throwing it overboard would help them to higher and gaudier and more lucrative office. I say high or low, and I mean it literally. There has not been a President of the United States for half a century who did not, at some time or other in his career perform a complete *volte face* in order to further his career. There is scarcely a United States Senator who does not flop at least three times within the limits of a single session.

The novelists who write about Washington are partly recruited from the ranks of the Washington newspaper correspondents, perhaps the most naïve and unreflective body of literate men in Christendom, and for the rest from the ranks of those who read the dispatches of such correspondents, and take them seriously. The result is a grossly distorted and absurd picture of life in the capital city. One carries off the notion that the essential Washington drama is based on a struggle between a powerful and corrupt Senator and a sterling young reformer and idealist. The Senator is about to sell out the Republic to the Steel Trust, J. P. Morgan, or the Japs. The idealist detects him, exposes him, drives him from public life, and inherits his toga. The love interest is supplied by a fair typist who steals the damning papers from the Senator's strong-box, or by an Ambassador's wife who goes to the White House at 3 a.m., and, at the peril of her virtue, arouses the President and tells him what is afoot. All this is poppycock. There are no Senators in Washington powerful enough to carry on any such operations single-handed, and very few of them

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are corrupt: it is too easy to bamboozle them to go to the expense of buying them. The most formidable bribe that the average Senator receives from year's end to year's end is a bottle or two of very dubious Scotch whisky, and that is just as likely to come from the agent of the South Central Watermelon Growers Association as from John D. Rockefeller or the Mikado of Japan. Nor are there any sterling young idealists in the town. The last was chased out before the Civil War. There are to-day only gentlemen looking for something for themselves — publicity, eminence, puissance, office — especially office. Some take one line and some another. Further than that the difference between them is no greater than the difference between a Prohibition agent and a bootlegger, or Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Ideas count for nothing in Washington, whether they be political, economic, or moral. The question isn't what a man thinks, but what he has to give away that is worth having. Ten years ago a professional Prohibitionist had no more standing in the town than a professional astrologer, Assyriologist, or wart-remover; five years ago, having proved that his gang could make or break Congressmen, he got all the deference that belonged to the Chief Justice; now, with the wet wolves chasing him, he is once more in eclipse. If William Z. Foster, the American Lenin, were elected President to-morrow, the most fanatical political Conservatives of to-day would flock to the White House the day after, and try to catch his eye. Mr. Coolidge, while Mr. Harding was living, was an obscure and impotent fellow, viewed with contempt by everyone. The

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instant he mounted the throne he became a Master Mind. Fergusson got all of this into *Capitol Hill*, which is not the story of a combat between the True and the False in politics, but the simple tale of a typical Washingtonian's struggle to the front. He begins as a petty functionary in the Capitol itself, mailing congressional speeches to constituents on the steppes; he ends at the head of a glittering banquet table, with a Senator to one side of him and a member of the Cabinet to the other—a man who has somehow got power into his hands and can dispense offices, and is thus an indubitable somebody. Everybody in Washington who has offices to dispense is somebody.

This eternal struggle is sordid, but, as Fergusson has shown, it is also extremely amusing. It brings out, as the moralists say, the worst that is in human nature, which is always the most charming. It reduces all men to one common level of ignominy, and so rids them of their customary false faces. They take on a new humanity. Ceasing to be Guardians of the Constitution, Foes of Wall Street, Apostles of Economy, Prophets of World Peace, and such-like banshees, they become ordinary men, like John Doe and Richard Roe. One beholds them sweating, not liquid idealism, but genuine sweat. They hope, fear, aspire, suffer. They are preyed upon, not by J. P. Morgan, but by designing flappers. They go to the White House, not to argue for the World Court, but to seek comfortable berths in the public service. From end to end of Fergusson's chronicle there is absolutely no mention of the tariff, or of the farmer and his woes, or of the budget system, or of the Far Eastern question. I marvel that more American

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novelists have not gone to this lush and delightful material. The supply is endless and lies wide open. Six months in Washington is enough to load an ambitious novelist for all eternity. (Think of what George Moore has made of his one love affair, back in 1877!) The Washington correspondents, of course, look at it without seeing it, and so do all the Washington novelists save Fergusson. But that is saying nothing. A Washington correspondent is one with a special talent for failing to see what is before his eyes.

§ 3

But I am forgetting my other candidates – for example, the American university president. I mean, of course, the university president of the new six-cylinder, air-cooled, four-wheel-brake model – half the quack, half the visionary, and wholly the go-getter – the brisk, business-like, confidential, buttonholing fellow who harangues Rotary and Kiwanis, extracts millions from usurers by alarming them about Bolshevism, and so builds his colossal pedagogical slaughterhouse, with its tens of thousands of students, its professors of cheese-making, investment securities and cheer-leading, its galaxy of football stars, and its general air of Barnum's circus. Why has this astounding mountebank not got into a book? He fairly yells for loving embalming *à la* Babbitt. He is not only stupendously picaresque and amusing in himself – the final heir, at once, of Abelard, Cagliostro, Increase Mather, the Fox sisters, Pestalozzi, Godey of the *Ladies' Book*, and William Jennings Bryan – he is also thoroughly and magnificently characteristic of the great land he lives in. No other

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country has ever produced anything quite like him. No other country, I suspect, would tolerate him. But in the Republic he lives and flourishes, a superb and perfect Americano – and yet the native novelists all neglect him.

Worse and more incredible still, they neglect the most American of all Americans, the very *Ur-Amerikaner* – to wit, the malignant moralist, the Christian turned psychic cannibal, the snouting and preposterous Puritan. Where is there the American novel in which he is even half limned? There are, to be sure, glimpses of him in *The Song of the Lark*, by Willa Cather, and in *Babbitt*, and there is a more elaborate but still incomplete sketch in E. W. Howe's *The Story of a Country Town*. But Howe, unfortunately, had other fish to fry: he slapped in his bucolic wowser brilliantly, and then passed on to melodrama and the agonies of young love. So, too, with Lewis and Miss Cather. Thus, though the Puritan Father lies embalmed magnificently in the pages of Hawthorne, his heir and assign of the present day, the high-powered uplifter, the prophet of harsh and unenforceable laws, the incurable reformer and nuisance – this sweet fellow yet awaits his anatomist.

What a novel is in him! Indeed, what a shelf of novels! For he has as many forms as there are varieties of human delusion. Sometimes he is a tin-pot evangelist, sweating to transform Oklahoma City or Altoona, Pa., into the New Jerusalem. Sometimes he is a hireling of the Anti-Saloon League, sworn to Law Enforcement. Sometimes he is a strict Sabbatarian, bawling for the police whenever he detects his neighbour washing bottles or varnishing the

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Ford on Sunday morning. Again, he is a vice-crusader, chasing the scarlet lady with fierce Christian shouts. Yet again, he is a comstock, wearing out his eyes in the quest for smut. He may even be female – a lady Ph.D. in a linoleum hat, patrolling the cow towns and the city slums, handing out edifying literature, teaching poor Polish women how to have babies. Whatever his form, he is tremendously grotesque and tremendously amusing – and always he drips with national juices, always he is as thoroughly American as a bootlegger or a college yell. If he exists at all in other lands, it is only in rudimentary and aberrant forms. Try to imagine a French Wayne B. Wheeler, or a Spanish Pussyfoot Johnson, or a German William Jennings Bryan. It is as impossible as imagining a Coolidge in the Rome of Julius.

Since the earliest days, as everyone knows, American jurisprudence has been founded upon the axiom that it is the first duty of every citizen to police his neighbours, and especially those he envies, or otherwise dislikes. There is no such thing, in that grand and puissant nation, as privacy. The yokels out in Iowa, neglecting their horned cattle, have a right, it appears – nay, a sacred duty! – to peek into my ancestral castle in Baltimore, and tell me what I may and may not drink with my meals. An out-at-elbow Methodist parson in Boston sets himself up to decide what I may read. An obscure and unintelligent office-holder in Washington, inspired by God, determines what I may receive in the mails. I must not buy lottery tickets because it offends the moral sentiment of Kansas. I must keep Sunday as the Sabbath, which is in conflict with Genesis,

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because it is ordered by persons who believe that Genesis can't be wrong. Such are the laws of the greatest free nation ever seen on earth. All Americans are governed by them. But a government of laws, of course, is a mere phantasm of political theorists: the thing is always found, on inspection, to be really a government of men. In the United States, it seems to me, the tendency is for such men to come increasingly from the class of professional uplifters. It is not the bankers who run the ostensible heads of the state, as the Liberals believe, nor the so-called Tammany bosses, as the bosses themselves believe, but the wowzers. And what is a wowser? What does the word mean? It means precisely what you think of inevitably when you hear it. A wowser is a wowser. He bears a divine commission to regulate and improve the rest of us. He knows exactly what is best for us. He is what Howe calls a Good Man. So long as you and I are sinful, he can't sleep. So long as we are happy, he is after us.

I throw off the guess that there are at least forty novels in the American wowser — that is, forty good ones. He has, as I have said, as many forms as the demons who ride him, and every one of them should make a competent novelist, authentically called to the vocation, leap in air with loud hosannas, and spit upon his hands. His psychology remains mysterious. The Freudians, I believe, have misunderstood him, and the psychiatrists have avoided him. What are the springs of his peculiar frenzy to harass and punish his fellow-men? By what process of malign eugenics is he hatched? And what is his typical life history? Here is work for the novelist, which is to say, for

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the professional anatomist of character. I believe that the late Frank Norris, had he lived, would have tackled it with enthusiasm, and made a great success of its execution. Norris, like Dreiser after him, had a romantic and even a mystical inclination, but at bottom he was a satirist – and the American Puritan was made for satirists as catnip was made for cats. It is easy to laugh at him, but it is hard to hate him. He is eternally in the position of a man trying to empty the ocean with a dipper. He will be mauled, and the chance he offers thrown away, if the novelist who attempts him in the end forgets the tragedy under his comedy. I have known many American wowsers in my time, some of them intimately. They were all intensely unhappy men. They suffered as vastly as Prometheus chained to his rock, with the buzzards exploring his liver. A novelist blind to that capital fact will never comprehend the type. It needs irony – but above all it needs pity.

§ 4

So does another type that also awaits its Thackeray: to wit, the American journalist. Most American novelists, before they challenge Dostoevski, put in an apprenticeship on the public prints, and thus have a chance to study and grasp the peculiarities of the journalistic mind; nevertheless, the fact remains that there is not a single genuine pressman, done in the grand manner, in the whole range of American fiction. As in the case of the wowser, there are some excellent brief sketches, but there is no adequate portrait of the journalist as a whole, from his beginnings as a romantic young reporter to his finish as a Babbitt, correct

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in every idea and as hollow as a jug. Here, I believe, is genuine tragedy. Here is the matter that enters into all fiction of the first class. Here is human character in disintegration – the primary theme of every sound novelist ever heard of, from Fielding to Zola and from Turgeniev to Joseph Conrad. I know of no American who starts from a higher level of aspiration than the journalist. He is, in his first phase, genuinely romantic. He plans to be both an artist and a moralist – a master of lovely words and a merchant of sound ideas. He ends, commonly, as the most depressing ass in his community – that is, if his career goes on to what is called success. He becomes the repository of all its worst delusions and superstitions. He becomes the darling of all its frauds and idiots, and the despair of all its honest men. He belongs to a good club, and the initiation fee was his soul.

Here I speak by the book, for I have been in active practice as a journalist in the United States for more than a quarter of a century, and have an immense acquaintance in the craft. I could name a man who fits my specifications exactly in every American city east of the Mississippi, and refrain only on the advice of counsel. I do not say that all journalists go that route. Far from it! Many escape by failing; some even escape by succeeding. But the majority succumb. They begin with high hopes. They end with safe jobs. In the career of any such man, it seems to me, there are materials for fiction of the highest order. He is interesting intrinsically, for his early ambition is at least not ignoble – he is not born an earthworm. And he is interesting as a figure in drama, for he falls gradually,

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resisting all the while, to forces that are beyond his strength. If he can't, as the American phrase has it, make the grade, it is not because he is unwilling or weak, but because the grade itself is too steep. Here is tragedy – and here is America. For the curse of the country, as of all democracies, is precisely the fact that it treats its best men as enemies. The aim of its society, if it may be said to have an aim, is to iron them out. The ideal American, in the public sense, is a respectable vacuum.

I heave this typical American journalist to the massed novelists of the Federal Union, and invite them to lay on. There is a capital novel in him – a capital character sketch and a capital picture of the American scene. He is representative and yet he is not commonplace. People will recognize him, and yet they are not familiar with him. Let the fictioneers have at him! But let them bear in mind that, like the wowser, he is not to be done to the tune of superior sneers. He is a wreck, but he has not succumbed to the gales without resistance. Let him be done ironically, as Lewis did Babbitt, but let him be done also with pity. He is not a comedian, but a tragedian. Above all, let him be done without any mouthing of theories. His simple story is poignant enough.

CHAPTER XII
THE CRITIC AS ARTIST

THE doctrine that every critic worth reading is primarily an artist – that his fundamental aim is not to ascertain the truth, or to mete out justice, or to defend the maxims of Aristotle, or the Ten Commandments, or the university statutes of Oxford, or the Treaty of Versailles – this doctrine seems to give a great deal of offence to literary pedagogues, and every time one of them mentions it he mourns. Always he makes the accusation that it relieves the critic of his most important duty, to wit, the duty of telling his readers precisely what the thing he criticizes is, and how far it carries out its pretension, and how it relates itself to other things in the same category, or presumably in the same category. The answer here, of course, is that no such duty exists. Its existence, indeed, is no more than a delusion of pedagogues, who invariably labour under the notion that they have said something about this or that when they have given it a name. That delusion is responsible for all of the so-called ‘criticism’ that pedagogues write – the heavy, soggy essays upon Matthew Arnold, Poe as a poet, Browning as a philosopher, the Pre-Raphaelites, Henley, Schiller, Ibsen, Whitman, Crashaw, Herrick, Molière – in brief, all the blowsy efforts to reach ‘definitive judgments’ that such tedious wind-machines delight in. What is accomplished by these ‘definitive judgments’? Absolutely nothing. A university pedant’s elaborate treatise upon Etherege will never convince any intelligent man that Etherege was an important writer, nor will the same professor’s effort to fit Milton into the Modernist

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æsthetic and gnosiology ever stop any intelligent man from reading Milton for himself, and enjoying him more or less. Such 'criticism' invariably fails of its ostensible purpose. In so far as it has any validity and significance at all, it is not as jurisprudence but as work of art. In brief, the pedagogue, when he essays criticism, becomes an artist in spite of himself. As a moral man, of course, he avoids the sin of being a good artist, but nevertheless he is, within the limits set by his superstitions, an artist.

What separates good critics from bad ones is simply the fact that the former are sound enough artists to make the matter they discuss seem charming. It is by this route that they induce their readers to look into it further, and so achieve their function. This function is not to be confused with the pedagogical. It is infinitely more urbane and expansive. Dryden was surely no schoolmaster, even *in petto*, but when he set down his views about Shakespeare in his beautiful and ingratiating prose he interested more readers in the Bard than a whole herd of pedagogues could have mustered, and so, despite the chill that often got into his enthusiasm, he probably did more than any other man to rescue the greatest of English poets from his Restoration days' neglect. What a palpable artist finds interesting is very apt to seem interesting to all persons of taste; what a mere literary birchman advocates is apt to arouse their instinctive aversion. They do not want to be told precisely what to think about the thing discussed; all they want to be told is that it is worth examining. Every effort to lay down immutable conclusions, to state impeccable principles, to instruct them in their moral and æsthetic duties – in other

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words, every effort to think for them, as a tutor thinks for a student, and a vice-chancellor for a tutor, and God for a vice-chancellor – is bound to annoy them and chase them away. Despite all the 'definitive judgments' that pedants have pronounced upon Dickens, almost always unfavourably, he continues to live and to grow. And despite all their herculean efforts to hold up Trollope, he is dead.

The case of Whitman comes to mind at once. The orthodox American criticism of his own time was almost unanimously against him. At his first appearance, true enough, a few critics were a bit dazzled by him, notably Emerson, but they quickly got control of their faculties and took to cover. Down to the time of his death the prevailing doctrine in the United States was that he was a third-rate poet and a dirty fellow. Any young university reader in beautiful letters who, in the 'seventies, or even in the early 'eighties, had presumed to whoop for him would have been cashiered at once, as both incompetent and immoral. If there was anything definitively established by American criticism in those days, it was that old Walt was below the salt. But to-day he is taught to schoolboys everywhere in the Republic, perhaps even in Tennessee, and one of the most unctuously respectable of American publishing houses brings out *Leaves of Grass* unexpurgated, and everyone agrees that he is one of the glories of the national letters. Has that change been brought about by a purely critical process? Does it represent a triumph of criticism over darkness? It does not. It represents, rather, a triumph of external forces over criticism. Whitman's first American partisans were not interested in poetry; they

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were interested in sex. They were presently reinforced by persons interested in politics. They were finally converted into a majority by a tatterdemalion horde of persons interested mainly, and perhaps only, in making a noise.

Literary criticism, properly so-called, had little if anything to do with this transformation. Scarcely a critic of any recognized authority had a hand in it. What started it off, after the first furtive, gingery snuffling over *A Woman Waits for Me* and the *Calamus* cycle, was the rise of political Radicalism in the United States in the early 'eighties, in reaction against the swinish materialism that followed the Civil War. I am tempted to say that Terence V. Powderly, a forgotten Labour agitator, had more to do with the rehabilitation of Whitman at home than any American critic, or, indeed, than any American poet. And if you object to Powderly, then I offer you Karl Marx, with William Jennings Bryan — no less! — peeping out of his coat-pocket. These Radicals made heavy weather of it at the start. To the average respectable American they seemed to be mere criminals. Like the Bolsheviki of a later era, they were represented by their opponents as the enemies of all mankind. What they needed, obviously, was some means of stilling the popular fear of them — some way of tapping the national sentimentality. There stood Whitman, conveniently to hand. In his sonorous strophes to an imaginary and preposterous democracy there was an eloquent statement of their own vague and windy yearnings, and, what is more, a certificate to their virtue as sound Americans. So they adopted him with loud hosannas, and presently he was both their poet and philosopher. Long

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before any professor at Harvard dared to mention him (save, perhaps, with lascivious winks), he was being read to tatters by thousands of lonely Socialists in the mining towns. As Radicalism froze into Liberalism, and so began to influence the *intelligentsia*, his vogue rose, and by the end of the century even schoolmasters had begun to hear of him. There followed the free verse poets, *i.e.*, a vast herd of emerging barbarians with an itch to make an uproar in the world, and no capacity for mastering the orthodox rules of prosody. Thus Whitman came to Valhalla, pushed by political propagandists and pulled by literary mountebanks. The American Taines and Matthew Arnolds made a gallant defence, but in vain. In the remoter 'colleges' of the prairie some of them still hold out. But Whitman is now just as respectable at Yale as Martin Tupper.

The point is that his new respectability is as insecure as his old infamy – that he may be heaved out, on some bright to-morrow, just as he was heaved in, and by a similar combination of purely non-literary forces. Already I hear rumours of a plan to make Dr. Coolidge King. Democracy, indeed, begins to sicken. The doctors at its bedside dose it out of a black bottle, and make sinister signals to the coroner. If it dies in America, then Whitman will probably die with it. Criticism, of course, will labour desperately to save him, as it once laboured to dispose of him, but such struggles are nearly always futile. The most they ever accomplish is to convert the author defended into a sort of fossil, preserved in a showcase to plague and puzzle schoolboys. The orthodox textbooks, used in all American schools, are simply such

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showcases. They represent the final effort of pedants to capture zephyrs and chain torrents. They are monuments to the delusion that criticism may be definitive -- that appeals to the emotions, which shift and change with every wind, may be appraised and sorted out by appeals to the mind, which is theoretically unchangeable. Certainly every reflective student of any of the fine arts should know that this is not so. There is no such thing as literary immortality. We remember Homer, but we forget the poets that the Greeks, too, forgot. You may be sure that there were Shakespeares in Carthage, and more of them at the court of Amenophis IV, but their very names are lost. Our own Shakespeare, as year chases year, may go the same way; in fact, his going the same way is quite as certain as anything we can imagine. A thousand years hence, even five hundred years hence, he may be, like Beowulf, only a name in a book, to be remembered against examination day and then forgotten.

Criticism is thus anything but scientific, for it cannot reach judgments that are surely and permanently valid. The most it can do, at its best, is to pronounce verdicts that are valid here and now, in the light of living knowledge and prejudice. As the background shifts the verdict changes. The best critic is not that fool who tries to resist the process -- by setting up artificial standards, by prattling of laws and principles that do not exist, by going into the dead past for criteria of the present -- but that more prudent fellow who submits himself frankly to the flow of his time, and rejoices in its aliveness. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve was a good critic, for he saw everything as a Frenchman of

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the Second Empire, and if his judgments must be revised to-day it still remains true that they were honest and intelligent when he formulated them. Mr. Balderdash is a bad critic, for he judges what is done in the world of to-day in the light of what was held to be gospel in the world of a century ago. For the rest, the critic survives, when he survives at all, simply as artist. His judgments, in the long run, become archaic, and may be disregarded. But if, in stating them, he has incidentally produced a work of art on his own account, then he is read long after they are rejected, and it may be plausibly argued that he has contributed something to the glory of letters. No one takes much stock in Macaulay's notions to-day. He fell into many gross errors, and sometimes, it is probable, he fell into them more or less deliberately. But his criticism is still read — that is, as much as any criticism is read. It holds all its old charm and address. For Macaulay, when he sat himself down to be critical, did not try fatuously to produce a scientific treatise. What he tried to do was to produce a work of art.

CHAPTER XIII

PAINTING AND ITS CRITICS

HAVING emerged lately from a diligent course of reading in so-called art criticism, and especially in that variety of it which is concerned with the painters since Cézanne, I can only report that I find it windy stuff, and sadly lacking in clarity and sense. The new critics, indeed, seem to me to be quite as vague and absurd as some of the new painters they celebrate. The more they explain and expound the thing they profess to admire, the more unintelligible it becomes. Criticism, in their hands, turns into a sort of cabbalism. One must prepare for it by acquiring a wholly new vocabulary, and a new system of logic.

I do not argue here that the new painting, in itself, is always absurd. On the contrary, it must be manifest to anyone with eyes that some of its inventions are bold and interesting, and that now and then it achieves a sort of beauty. What I argue is simply that the criticism it has bred does not adequately account for it — that no man of ordinary sense, seeking to find out just what it is about, will get any light from what is currently written about it. All he will get will be a bath of metaphysics, heated with indignation. Polemics take the place of exposition. One comes away with a guilty feeling that one is somehow grossly ignorant and boulderish, but unable to make out why. The same phenomenon is occasionally witnessed in other fields. There was, a generation ago, the case of Ibsen and the symbolists. These imbeciles read such extravagant meanings into the old man's plays that he was moved, finally, to violent protests. He was not trying to compose

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cryptograms, he said; he was simply trying to write stage plays. In much the same way Cézanne protested against the nonsense of his earliest disciples and interpreters. He was no messiah, he said; he was only a painter who tried to reduce what he saw in the world to canvas. The Ibsen symbolists eventually subsided into Freudism and other such rubbish, but the Cézannists continue to spoil paper with their occult tosh. I have read nearly all of them, and I denounce all that I have read as quacks.

This tendency to degenerate into a mere mouthing of meaningless words seems to be peculiar to so-called art criticism. There has never been, so far as I know, a critic of painting who wrote about it simply and clearly, as Sainte-Beuve, say, wrote about books, or Schumann and Berlioz about music. Even the most orthodox of the brethren, when he finds himself before a canvas that genuinely moves him, takes refuge in esoteric winks and grimaces and mysterious gurgles and belches. He can never put his feelings into plain English. Always, before he is done, he is sweating metaphysics, which is to say, bilge. Painters themselves, when they discuss their art, commonly go the same route. Every time a new revolutionist gives a show he issues a manifesto explaining his aims and achievements, and in every such manifesto there is the same blowsy rodomontadizing that one finds in the texts of the critics. The thing, it appears, is very profound. Something new has been discovered. Rembrandt, poor old boy, lived and died in ignorance of it. Turner, had he heard of it, would have yelled for the police. Even Gauguin barely glimpsed it. One can't make out what this new arcanum is, but one

takes it on faith and goes to the show. What one finds there is a series of canvases that appear to have been painted with asphalt and mayonnaise, and by a man afflicted with binocular diplopic strabismus. Is this sound drawing? Is this a new vision of colour? Then so is your grandmother Archbishop of Canterbury. The exceptions are very few. I have read, I suppose, at least two hundred such manifestos during the past twenty years; at one time I even started out to collect them, as odd literary delicacies. I can't recall a single one that embodied a plain statement of an intelligible idea – that is, intelligible to a man of ordinary information and sanity. It always took a special talent to comprehend them, as it took a special talent to paint the fantastic pictures they discussed.

Two reasons, I believe, combine to make the *pronunciamentos* of painters so bombastic and flatulent. One lies in the plain fact that painting is a relatively simple and transparent art, and that nothing much of consequence is thus to be said about it. All that is remarkable in even the most profound painting may be grasped by an educated spectator in a few minutes. If he lingers longer he is simply seeing again what he has seen before. His essential experience, in other words, is short-lived. It is not like getting shaved, coming down with the cholera morbus, or going to the wars; it is like jumping out of the way of a taxicab or getting kissed. Consider, now, the position of a critic condemned to stretch this experience into material for a column article or for a whole chapter in a book. Obviously, he soon finds it insufficient for this purpose. What, then, is he to do? Tell the truth, and then suspend? This,

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alas, is not the way of critics. When their objective facts run out they always turn to subjective facts, of which the supply is unlimited. Thus the art critic begins to roll his eyes inward. He begins to poetize and philosophize his experience. He indulges himself in dark hints and innuendoes. Putting words together aimlessly, he presently hits upon a combination that tickles him. He has invented a new *cliché*. He is a made man. The painter, expounding his work, falls into the same bog. The plain fact, nine times out of ten, is that he painted his picture without any rational plan whatever. Like any other artist, he simply experimented with his materials, trying this combination and then that. Finally he struck something that pleased him. Now he faces the dreadful job of telling why. He simply doesn't know. So he conceals his ignorance behind recondite and enigmatical phrases. He soars, insinuates, sputters, coughs behind his hand. If he is lucky, he, too, invents a *cliché*. Three *clichés* in a row, and he is a temporary immortal.

Behind what is written about painting there is always, of course, the immense amount of drivel that is talked about it. No other art is so copiously discussed by its practitioners, or encrusted with so much hollow theorizing. The reason therefore – the second of the two I mentioned above – lies in the obvious fact that painters can talk while they work, and are debarred from working at least half of their waking hours. A poet, when his hormones begin to ferment, not infrequently labours all night; when there is a fog, a thunderstorm, or a torchlight procession, he is specially inspired. So with a musical composer. But a painter can

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work only while the light is good, and in the North Temperate Zone that is not often. So he has much time on his hands, and inasmuch as he seldom has money enough to venture into general society and is usually too ignorant to enjoy reading, he puts in that time talking. Nowhere else on this earth is there so much gabbling as you will find in painters' studios, save it be in the pubs and more or less public bedrooms that they frequent. It begins as soon as the sun goes down, and it keeps on all night. And it is always about painting, painting, painting. No other class of artists is so self-centred. Once a youth gets a brush into his hand and turpentine in his hair, he appears to join a race apart, and is interested no longer in the general concerns of the world. Even the other arts do not commonly engage any of his attention. If he ventures into music, it is into the banal music of nigger minstrels. If he reads, it is only the colicky nonsense that I have been describing. Even his amours are but incidents of his trade. Now put this immense leisure and this great professional keenness against the plain fact that the problems of painting, in the main, are very simple — that very little that is new is to be said about any of them. The result is a vast dilution of ideas, a stormy battle of mere words, an infinite logomachy. And on its higher levels, embellished with all the arts of the auctioneer, it is art criticism.

CHAPTER XIV
ON LIVING IN THE PROVINCES

SOME time ago, writing in the eminent Baltimore *Evening Sun*, the *Manchester Guardian* of America, upon the Baltimore of my boyhood, I permitted myself an eloquent passage upon its charm, and let fall the doctrine that nearly all of that charm had vanished. Mere rhetoric, I greatly fear. The old charm, in truth, still survives in the town, despite the frantic efforts of the boosters and boomers who, in late years, have replaced all its ancient cobblestones with asphalt, and bedizened it with Great White Ways and suburban boulevards, and surrounded it with stinking steel plants and oil refineries, and increased its population from 400,000 to 800,000. I am never more conscious of the fact than when I return to it from New York. Behind me lies the greatest city of the modern world, with more money in it than all Europe and more clowns and harlots than all Asia, and yet it has no more charm than a second-rate hotel. It can't show a single genuinely distinguished street. It hasn't a single park that is really lovely. It is without manner as it is without manners. Escaping from it to so ancient (for America) and solid a town as Baltimore is like coming out of a football crowd into quiet communion with a fair one who is also amiable, and has the gift of consolation for hard-beset and despairing men.

I have confessed to rhetoric, but I surely do not indulge in it here. For twenty-five years I have resisted a constant temptation to move to New York, and I resist it more easily to-day than I did when it began. My office is on

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Manhattan Island and has been there since 1914; yet I live and have my being in Baltimore, and go back there, two hundred miles away, the instant my job allows. If my desk bangs at 3 p.m., I leap for the 3.25 train. Four long hours of travel follow, but the first is the worst. My back, at all events, is toward New York! Behind lies a place fit only for the gross business of getting money; ahead is a place made for enjoying it.

What makes New York so dreadful, I believe, is mainly the fact that the vast majority of its people have been forced to rid themselves of one of the oldest and most powerful of human instincts – the instinct to make a permanent home. Crowded, shoved about and exploited without mercy, they have lost the feeling that any part of the earth belongs to them, and so they simply camp out like tramps, waiting for the constables to rush in and chase them away. I am not speaking here of the poor (God knows how they exist in New York at all!); I am speaking of the prosperous, even of the rich. The very richest man, in New York, is never quite sure that the house he lives in now will be his next year – that he will be able to resist the constant pressure of business expansion and rising land values. I have known actual millionaires to be chased out of their homes in this way, and forced into flats. In Baltimore, too, the same pressure exists, to be sure, but it is not oppressive, for the householder can meet it by yielding to it half-way. It may force him into the suburbs, even into the adjacent country, but he is still in direct contact with the city, sharing in its life, and wherever he lands he may make a stand. But on Manhattan Island he is quickly brought

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up by the rivers, and once he has crossed them he may as well move to New Haven or Trenton.

Nine times out of ten he tries to avoid crossing them. That is, he moves into meaner quarters on the island itself, and pays more for them. His house gives way to a flat — one offering perhaps half the room for his goods and chattels that his house offered. Next year he is in a smaller flat, and three-fourths of his goods and chattels have vanished. A few years more, and he is in two or three rooms. Finally, he lands in an hotel. At this point he ceases to exist as the head of a house. His quarters are precisely like the quarters of 50,000 other New Yorkers. The front he presents to the world is simply an anonymous door on a gloomy corridor. Inside, he lives like a sardine in a can. Such a habitation, it must be plain, cannot be called a home. A home is not a mere transient shelter: its essence lies in its permanence, in its capacity for accretion and solidification, in its quality of representing, in all its details, the personalities of the people who live in it. In the course of years it becomes a sort of museum of these people; they give it its indefinable air, separating it from all other homes, as one human face is separated from all others. It is at once a refuge from the world, a treasure-house, a castle, and the shrine of a whole hierarchy of peculiarly private and potent gods.

This concept of the home cannot survive the mode of life that prevails in New York. I have seen it go to pieces under my eyes in the houses of my own friends. The intense crowding in the town, and the restlessness and unhappiness that go with it, make it almost impossible for

anyone to accumulate the materials of a home – the trivial, fortuitous and often grotesque things that gather around a family, as glories and debts gather around a State. The New Yorker lacks the room to house them; he thus learns to live without them. In the end he is a stranger in the house he lives in. More and more, it tends to be no more than Job No. 16432b from this or that decorator's studio. I know one New Yorker, a man of considerable means, who moves every three years. Every time he moves his wife sells the entire contents of the apartment she is leaving, and employs a decorator to outfit the new one. To me, at all events, such a mode of living would be unendurable. The charm of getting home, as I see it, is the charm of getting back to what is inextricably my own – to things familiar and long loved, to things that belong to me alone and none other. I have lived in one house in Baltimore for forty-five years. It has changed in that time, as I have – but somehow it still remains the same. No conceivable decorator's masterpiece could give me the same ease. It is as much a part of me as my two hands. If I had to leave it I'd be as certainly crippled as if I lost a leg.

The New Yorker has simply lost that feeling. He is a vagabond. His notions of the agreeable become those of a music-hall actor. He takes on the shallowness and unpleasantness of any other homeless man. He is highly sophisticated, and inordinately trashy. The fact no doubt explains the lack of charm that one finds in his town; the fact that the normal man of Baltimore is almost his exact antithesis explains the charm that is there. Human rela-

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tions, in such a place, tend to assume a solid permanence. A man's circle of friends becomes a sort of extension of his family circle. His contacts are with men and women who are rooted as he is. They are not moving all the time, and so they are not changing their friends all the time. Thus abiding relationships tend to be built up, and when fortune brings unexpected changes, they survive those changes. The men I know and esteem in Baltimore are, on the whole, men I have known and esteemed a long while; even those who have come into my ken relatively lately seem likely to last. But of the men I knew best when I first began going to New York, twenty-five years ago, not one is a friend to-day. Of those I knew best ten years ago, not six are friends. The rest have got lost in the riot, and the friends of to-day, I sometimes fear, will get lost in the same way.

In human relationships that are so casual there is seldom any satisfaction. It is our fellows who make life endurable to us, and give it a purpose and a meaning; if our contacts with them are light and frivolous there is something lacking, and it is something of the very first importance. What I contend is that in a provincial city, under a slow-moving and cautious social organization, such contacts are more enduring than elsewhere, and that life in consequence is more agreeable. Of the external embellishments of life there is a plenty – as great a supply, indeed, to any rational taste, as in New York itself. But there is also something much better: a tradition of sound and comfortable living. A Baltimorean is not merely John Doe, an isolated individual of *Homo sapiens*, exactly like every other John Doe.

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He is John Doe of a certain place — of Baltimore, of a definite *house* in Baltimore. It is not by accident that all the peoples of Europe, very early in their history, distinguished their best men by adding *of* this or that place to their names.

I OFTEN wonder how much sound and nourishing food is fed to the animals in the zoological gardens of Christendom every week, and try to figure out what the public gets in return for the cost thereof. The annual bill must surely run into millions; one is constantly hearing how much beef a lion downs at a meal and how many tons of hay an elephant dispatches in a month. And to what end? To the end, principally, that a horde of superintendents and keepers may be kept in easy berths. To the end, secondarily, that the least intelligent minority of the population may have an idiotic show to gape at on Sunday afternoons, and that the young of the human species may be instructed in the methods of amour prevailing among chimpanzees and become privy to the technique employed by jaguars, hyenas and polar bears in ridding themselves of lice.

So far as I can make out, after laborious visits to all the chief zoos of the world, no other imaginable purpose is served by their existence. One hears constantly, true enough (mainly from the gentlemen they support), that they are educational. But how? Just what sort of instruction do they radiate, and what is its value? I have never been able to find out. The sober truth is that they are no more educational than so many royal processions or displays of sky-rockets, and that all they actually offer to the public in return for the taxes wasted upon them is a form of idle and witless amusement, compared to which a visit to a spiritualist séance is informing, stimulating and ennobling.

Education your grandmother! Show me a schoolboy

who has ever learned anything valuable or important by watching a mangy old lion snoring away in its cage, or a family of monkeys fighting for nuts. To get any useful instruction out of such a spectacle is palpably impossible. The most it can imaginably impart is that the stripes of a certain sort of tiger run one way and the stripes of another sort some other way, that hyenas and polecats smell worse than railway navvies, and that the Latin name of the raccoon (who was unheard of by the Romans) is *Procyon lotor*. For the dissemination of such banal knowledge, absurdly emitted and defectively taken in, the taxpayers are mulcted in hundreds of thousands of pounds a year. As well make them pay for teaching policemen the theory of least squares, or for instructing roosters in the laying of eggs.

But the zoos, it is argued, are of scientific value. They enable learned men to study this or that. Again the facts blast the theory. No scientific discovery of any value whatsoever, even to the animals themselves, has ever come out of a zoo. The zoo scientist is the old woman of zoology, and his alleged wisdom is usually exhibited, not in the groves of actual learning, but in the Sunday newspapers. He is to biology what the late Camille Flammarion was to astronomy, which is to say, its court jester and *reductio ad absurdum*. When he leaps into public notice with some new pearl of knowledge, it commonly turns out to be no more than the news that Marie Bashkirtseff, the Russian lady walrus, has had her teeth plugged with zinc and is expecting twins. Or that Pishposh, the man-eating alligator, is down with locomotor ataxia. Or that Damon,

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the grizzly, has just finished his brother Pythias in the tenth round, chewing off his tail, nose and remaining ear.

Science, of course, has its uses for the lower animals. A diligent study of their livers and lights helps to an understanding of the anatomy and physiology, and particularly of the pathology, of man. They are necessary aids in devising and manufacturing many remedial agents, and in testing the virtues of those already devised; out of the mute agonies of a rabbit or a calf may come relief for a baby with diphtheria, or means for an archdeacon to escape the consequences of his youthful follies. Moreover, something valuable is to be got out of a mere study of their habits, instincts and ways of mind – knowledge that, by analogy, may illuminate the parallel doings of the *genus homo*, and so enable us to comprehend the primitive mental processes of politicians, lawyers, and the rev. clergy.

But it must be obvious that none of these studies can be made in a zoo. The zoo animals, to begin with, provide no material for the biologist; he can find out no more about their insides than what he discerns from a safe distance and through the bars. He is not allowed to try his germs and specifics upon them; he is not allowed to vivisect them. If he would find out what goes on in the animal body under this condition or that, he must turn from the inhabitants of the zoo to the customary guinea-pigs and stolen dogs, and buy or steal them for himself. Nor does he get any chance for profitable inquiry when zoo animals die (usually of lack of exercise or ignorant doctoring), for their carcasses are not handed to him for autopsy, but at once stuffed with gypsum and excelsior and placed in some museum.

Z O O S

Least of all do zoos produce any new knowledge about animal behaviour. Such knowledge must be got, not from animals penned up and tortured, but from animals in a state of nature. A zoologist studying the habits of the giraffe, for example, and confining his observation to specimens in zoos, would inevitably come to the conclusions that the giraffe is a sedentary and melancholy beast, standing immovable for hours at a time and employing an attendant to feed him hay and cabbages. As well proceed to a study of the psychology of a jurisconsult by first immersing him in Pentonville, or of a juggler by first cutting off his hands. Knowledge so gained is inaccurate and imbecile knowledge. Not even a zoologist, if sober, would give it any faith and credit.

There remains, then, the only true utility of a zoo: it is a childish and pointless show for the unintelligent, in brief, for children, nurse-maids, visiting yokels and the generality of the defective. Should the taxpayers be forced to sweat millions for such a purpose? I think not. The sort of man who likes to spend his time watching a cage of monkeys chase one another, or a lion gnaw its tail, or a lizard catch flies, is precisely the sort of man whose mental weakness should be combated at the public expense, and not fostered. He is a public liability and a public menace, and society should seek to improve him. Instead of that, we spend a lot of money to feed his degrading appetite and further paralyse his mind. It is precisely as if the community provided free champagne for dipsomaniacs, or hired lecturers to convert the Army to the doctrines of the Bolsheviki.

Of the abominable cruelties practised in zoos it is

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unnecessary to make mention. Even assuming that all the keepers are men of delicate nature and ardent zoophiles (which is about as safe as assuming that the keepers of a prison are all sentimentalists, and weep for the sorrows of their charges), it must be plain that the work they do involves an endless war upon the native instincts of the animals, and that they must thus inflict the most abominable tortures every day. What could be a sadder sight than a tiger in a cage, save it be a forest monkey climbing despairingly up a barked stump, or an eagle chained to its roost? How can man be benefited and made better by robbing the seal of its ice, the hippopotamus of its soft wallow, the buffalo of its open range, the lion of its kingship, the birds of their air?

I am no sentimentalist, God knows. I am in favour of vivisection unrestrained, so long as the vivisectionist knows what he is about. I advocate clubbing a dog that barks unnecessarily, which all dogs do. I enjoy hangings, particularly of converts to the evangelical faiths. I once poisoned a clergyman. The crunch of a cockroach is music to my ears. But when the day comes to turn the prisoners of the zoo out of their cages, if it is only to lead them to the swifter, kinder knife of the butcher, I shall be present and rejoicing, and if anyone present thinks to suggest that it would be a good plan to celebrate the day by shooting the whole zoo faculty, I shall have a revolver in my pocket and a sound eye in my head.

THREE AMERICAN IMMORTALS

§ 1. *Aristotelean Obsequies*

I take the following from the Boston (Massachusetts) *Herald* of May 1, 1882:

A beautiful floral book stood at the left of the pulpit, being spread out on a stand. . . . Its last page was composed of white carnations, white daisies and light-coloured immortelles. On the leaf was displayed, in neat letters of purple immortelles, the word 'Finis.' This device was about two feet square, and its border was composed of different coloured tea-roses. The other portion of the book was composed of dark- and light-coloured flowers. . . . The front of the large pulpit was covered with a mass of white pine boughs laid on loosely. In the centre of this mass of boughs appeared a large harp composed of yellow jonquils. . . . Above this harp was a handsome bouquet of dark pansies. On each side appeared large clusters of calla lilies.

Well, what have we here? The funeral of a Grand Goblin of the Ku Klux Klan, of an East Side Tammany leader, of an aged and much respected brothel-keeper? Nay. What we have here is the funeral of Ralph Waldo Emerson. It was thus that New England lavished the loveliest fruits of the Puritan æsthetic upon the bier of her greatest son. It was thus that the Puritan *Kultur* mourned a philosopher.

§ 2. *Edgar Allan Poe*

The myth that there is a monument to Edgar Allan Poe in Baltimore is widely believed; there are even persons who, stopping at Baltimore to eat oysters, go to look at it. As a matter of fact, no such monument exists. All that the explorer actually finds is an absurd statue in one of the

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more obscure parks, showing Poe drunk, and a cheap and hideous tombstone in the corner of a Presbyterian churchyard – a tombstone quite as bad as the worst in Père La Chaise. For twenty-six years after Poe's death there was not even this: the grave remained wholly unmarked. Poe had surviving relatives in Baltimore, and they were well-to-do. One day one of them ordered a local stonecutter to put a plain stone over the grave. The stonecutter hacked it out and was preparing to haul it to the churchyard when a runaway goods-van smashed into his stoneyard and broke the stone to bits. Thereafter the Poes seem to have forgotten Cousin Edgar; at all events, nothing further was done.

The existing tombstone was erected by a committee of Baltimore schoolmistresses, and cost about \$1,000. It took the dear girls ten long years to raise the money. They started out with a 'literary entertainment' which yielded \$380. This was in 1865. Six years later the fund had made such slow progress that, with accumulated interest, it came to but \$587.02. Three years more went by: it now reached \$627.55. Then some anonymous Poeista came down with \$100, two others gave \$50 each, one of the devoted schoolmistresses raised \$52, and George W. Childs, a Philadelphia editor, now forgotten, agreed to pay any remaining deficit. During all this time not a single American author of position gave the project any aid. And when, finally, a stone was carved and set up and the time came for the unveiling, the only one who appeared at the ceremony was Walt Whitman. All the other persons present were Baltimore nobodies – chiefly school-

mistresses and preachers. There were three set speeches — one by the principal of a local high-school, the second by a teacher in the same seminary, and the third by a man who was invited to give his 'personal recollections' of Poe, but who announced in his third sentence that 'I never saw Poe but once, and our interview did not last an hour.'

This was the gaudiest Poe celebration ever held in America. At his actual burial, in 1849, exactly eight persons were present, of whom six were relatives. He was planted, as I have said, in a Presbyterian churchyard, among generations of honest believers in infant damnation, but the officiating clergyman was a Methodist. Two days after his death a Baptist gentleman of God, the illustrious Rufus W. Griswold, printed a defamatory article upon him in the *New York Tribune*, and for years it set the tone of American criticism of him. And so he rests: thrust among Presbyterians by a Methodist and formally damned by a Baptist.

§ 3. *Memorial Service*

Let us summon from the shades the immortal soul of James Harlan, born in 1820, entered into rest in 1899. In the year 1865 this Harlan resigned from the United States Senate to enter the Cabinet of Abraham Lincoln as Secretary of the Interior. One of the junior clerks in that department, at \$600 a year, was Walt Whitman, lately emerged from three years of hard service as an Army nurse during the Civil War. One day, discovering that Whitman was the author of a book called *Leaves of Grass*, Harlan ordered him to be incontinently kicked out, and it was

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done forthwith. Let us remember this event and this man; he is too precious to die. Let us repair, once a year, to our accustomed houses of worship and there give thanks to God that one day in 1865 brought together the greatest poet that America has ever produced and the damndest ass.

PORTRAIT OF AN IDEAL WORLD

THAT alcohol in dilute aqueous solution, when taken into the human organism, acts as a depressant, not as a stimulant, is now so much a commonplace of knowledge that even the more advanced varieties of physiologists are beginning to be aware of it. The intelligent layman no longer resorts to the bottle when he has important business before him, whether intellectual or manual; he resorts to it after his business is done, and he desires to release his taut nerves and reduce the steam-pressure in his spleen. Alcohol, so to speak, unwinds us. It raises the threshold of sensation and makes us less sensitive to external stimuli, and particularly to those that are unpleasant. It reduces and simplifies the emotions. Putting a brake upon all the qualities which enable us to get on in the world and shine before our fellows – for example, combativeness, shrewdness, diligence, ambition – it releases the qualities which mellow us and make our fellows love us – for example, amiability, generosity, toleration, humour, sympathy. A man who has taken aboard two or three double whiskies is less competent than he was before to steer a battleship down the Channel, or to cut off a leg, or to draw up a will, or to conduct Bach's B minor mass, but he is immensely more competent to entertain a dinner party, or to admire a pretty girl, or to *hear* Bach's B minor mass. The harsh, useful things of the world, from plugging teeth to digging potatoes, are best done by men who are as starkly sober as so many convicts awaiting hanging, but the lovely and useless things, the

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charming and exhilarating things, are best done by men with, as the phrase is, a few sheets in the wind. *Pithecanthropus erectus* was a teetotaller, but the angels, you may be sure, know what is proper at the end of a grey afternoon.

All this is so obvious that I marvel that no Utopian has ever proposed to abolish all the sorrows of the world by the simple device of getting and keeping the whole human race gently tight. I do not say drunk, remember; I say simply gently tight – and apologize, as in duty bound, for not knowing how to describe the state in a more seemly phrase. The man who is in it is a man who has put all of his best qualities into his shop-window. He is not only immensely more amiable than the cold sober man: he is immeasurably more decent. He reacts to all situations in an expansive, generous and humane manner. He has become more liberal, more tolerant, more kind. He is a better citizen, husband, father, friend. The enterprises that make human life on this earth uncomfortable and unsafe are never launched by such men. They are not makers of wars; they do not rob and oppress anyone; they invent no such plagues as income taxes, jazz and Prohibition. All the great villainies of history, from the murder of Abel onward, have been perpetrated by sober men, and chiefly by teetotallers. But all the charming and beautiful things, from the Song of Songs to *bouillabaisse*, and from the nine Beethoven symphonies to the Martini cocktail, have been given to humanity by men who, when the hour came, turned from tap water to something with colour to it, and more in it than mere oxygen and hydrogen.

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I am well aware, of course, that getting the whole human race tight and keeping it tight, year in and year out, would present formidable technical difficulties. It would be hard to make the daily dose of each individual conform exactly to his private needs and hard to get it to him at precisely the right time. On the one hand, there would be the constant danger that large minorities might occasionally become cold sober, and so start wars, theological disputes, moral reforms, and other such unpleasantnesses. On the other hand, there would be danger that other minorities might proceed to actual intoxication, and so annoy us all with their fatuous bawling or maudlin tears. But such technical obstacles, of course, are by no means insurmountable. Perhaps they might be got around by abandoning the administration of alcohol *per ora* and distributing it instead by impregnating the air with it. I throw out the suggestion and pass on. Such questions are for men skilled in therapeutics, government and business efficiency. They exist to-day and their enterprises often show a high ingenuity, but, being chiefly sober, they devote too much of their time to harassing the rest of us. Half-tight, they would be ten times as humane, and perhaps at least half as efficient. Thousands of them, relieved of their present anti-social duties, would be idle, and eager for occupation. I trust to them in this small matter. If they didn't succeed completely, they would at least succeed partially.

The objection remains that even small doses of alcohol, if each followed upon the heels of its predecessor before the effects of the latter had worn off, would have a

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deleterious effect upon the physical health of the race — that the death-rate would increase, and whole categories of human beings would be exterminated. The answer here is that what I propose is not lengthening the span of life, but augmenting its joys. Suppose we assume that its duration is reduced 20 per cent. My reply is that its delights will be increased at least 100 per cent. Misled by statisticians, we fall only too often into the error of worshipping mere figures. To say that A will live to be eighty and B will die at forty is certainly not to argue plausibly that A is more to be envied than B. A, in point of fact, may have to spend all of his eighty years in Iraq or Arkansas, with nothing to eat save cold camel or grizzly bear, and nothing to drink save river water, whereas B may put in his twenty years of discretion upon the Côte d'Azur. It is my contention that the world I picture, even assuming the average duration of human life to be cut down 50 per cent., would be an infinitely happier and more charming world than that we live in to-day — that no intelligent human being, having once tasted its peace and joy, would go back voluntarily to the harsh brutalities and stupidities that we now suffer, and idiotically strive to prolong. If intelligent Englishmen, in these depressing days, still cling to life and try to stretch it out longer and longer, it is surely not logically, but only instinctively, which is to say, brutally. It is the primeval gorilla in them that hangs on, not the man. The man knows only too well that ten years in a genuinely happy country would be infinitely better than a geological epoch under the curses he must now face and endure every day.

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Moreover, there is no need to admit that the moderate alcoholization of the whole race would materially reduce the duration of life. A great many of us are moderately alcoholized already, and yet manage to survive quite as long as the total abstainers. As for the abstainers themselves, who would repine if breathing alcohol-laden air brought them down with delirium tremens and so sterilized and exterminated them? The advantage to the race in general would be obvious and incalculable. All the worst strains – which now not only persist, but even prosper – would be stamped out in a few generations, and so the average human being would move appreciably away from, say, the norm of a Primitive Baptist pastor in South Wales and toward the norm of Shakespeare, Mozart, and Goethe. It would take æons, of course, to go all the way, but there would be progress with every generation, slow but sure. To-day, it must be manifest, we make no progress at all; instead, we slip steadily backward. That the average civilized man of to-day is inferior to the average civilized man of two or three generations ago is too plain to need arguing. He has less enterprise and courage; he is less resourceful and various; he is more like a rabbit and less like a lion. Harsh oppressions have made him what he is. He is the victim of tyrants. . . . Well, no man with two or three drinks in him is a tyrant. He may be foolish, but he is not cruel. He may be noisy, but he is also genial, tolerant, generous, and kind. My proposal would restore Christianity to the world. It would rescue mankind from moralists, pedants, and brutes.

CHAPTER XVIII
FUNERAL MARCH

WHERE is the graveyard of dead gods? What lingering mourner waters their mounds? There was a day when Jupiter was the king of the gods, and any man who doubted his puissance was *ipso facto* a barbarian and an ignoramus. But where in all the world is there a man who worships Jupiter to-day? And what of Huitzilopochtli? In one year – and it is no more than five hundred years ago – 50,000 youths and maidens were slain in sacrifice to him. To-day, if he is remembered at all, it is only by some vagrant savage in the depth of the Mexican forest. Huitzilopochtli, like many other gods, had no human father; his mother was a virtuous widow; he was born of an apparently innocent flirtation that she carried on with the sun. When he frowned, his father, the sun, stood still. When he roared with rage, earthquakes engulfed whole cities. When he thirsted he was watered with 10,000 gallons of human blood. But to-day Huitzilopochtli is as magnificently forgotten as Marie Corelli. Once the peer of Allah, Buddha and Wotan, he is now the peer of Father Rasputin, J. B. Planché, Sadi Carnot, General Boulanger, Lottie Collins, and Little Tich.

Speaking of Huitzilopochtli recalls his brother, Tezcatilpoca. Tezcatilpoca was almost as powerful: he consumed 25,000 virgins a year. Lead me to his tomb: I would weep, and hang a *couronne des perles*. But who knows where it is? Or where the grave of Quitzalcoatl is? Or Tialoc? Or Chalchihuitlicue? Or Xiehtecutli? Or

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Centeotl, that sweet one? Or Tlazolteotl, the goddess of love? Or Mictlan? Or Ixtlilton? Or Omacatl? Or Yacatecutli? Or Mixcoatl? Or Xipe? Or all the host of Tzitzimitles? Where are their bones? Where is the willow on which they hung their harps? In what forlorn and unheard-of hell do they await the resurrection morn? Who enjoys their residuary estates? Or that of Dis, whom Cæsar found to be the chief god of the Celts? Or that of Tarves, the bull? Or that of Moccus, the pig? Or that of Epona, the mare? Or that of Mullo, the celestial ass? There was a time when the Irish revered all these gods as violently as they now revere the Pope. But to-day even the drunkest Irishman laughs at them.

But they have company in oblivion: the hell of dead gods is as crowded as the Presbyterian hell for babies. Damona is there, and Esus, and Drunemeton, and Silvana, and Dervones, and Adsalluta, and Deva, and Belisama, and Axona, and Vintios, and Taranuous, and Sulis, and Cocidius, and Adsmerius, and Dumiat, and Caletos, and Moccus, and Ollovidius, and Albiorix, and Leucitius, and Vitucadrus, and Ogmios, and Uxellimus, and Borvo, and Grannos, and Mogons. All mighty gods in their day, worshipped by millions, full of demands and impositions, able to bind and loose – all gods of the first class, not dilettanti. Men laboured for generations to build vast temples to them – temples with stones as large as motor-lorries. The business of interpreting their whims occupied thousands of priests, wizards, archdeacons, canons, deans, bishops, archbishops. To doubt them was to die, usually

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at the stake. Armies took to the field to defend them against infidels: villages were burned, women and children were butchered, cattle were driven off. Yet in the end they all withered and died, and to-day there is none so poor to do them reverence. Worse, the very tombs in which they lie are lost, and so even a respectful stranger is debarred from paying them the slightest and politest homage.

What has become of Sutehl, once the high god of the whole Nile Valley? What has become of:

Resheph	Baal
Anath	Astarte
Ashtoreth	Hadad
El	Addu
Nergal	Shalem
Nebo	Dagon
Ninib	Sharrab
Melek	Yau
Ahijah	Amon-Re
Isis	Osiris
Ptah	Sebek
Anubis	Moloch?

All these were once gods of the highest eminence. Many of them are mentioned with fear and trembling in the Old Testament. They ranked, five or six thousand years ago, with Jahveh himself; the worst of them stood far higher than Thor. Yet they have all gone down the chute, and with them the following:

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Bilé	Gwydion
Lêr	Manawyddan
Arianrod	Nuada Argetlam
Morrigu	Tagd
Govannon	Goibniu
Gunfled	Odin
Sokk-mimi	Llaw Gyffes
Memetona	Lleu
Dagda	Ogma
Kerridwen	Mider
Pwyll	Rigantona
Ogyrvan	Marzin
Dea Dia	Mars
Ceros	Jupiter
Vaticanus	Cunina
Edulia	Potina
Adeona	Statilinus
Iuno Lucina	Diana of Ephesus
Saturn	Robigus
Furrina	Pluto
Vediovis	Ops
Consus	Meditrina
Cronos	Vesta
Enki	Tilmun
Engurra	Zer-panitu
Belus	Merodach
Dimmer	U-ki
Mu-ul-lil	Dauke
Ubargisi	Gas-an-abzu
Ubilulu	Elum
Gas-an-lil	U-Tin-dir-ki
U-dimmer-an-kia	Marduk
Enurestu	Nin-lil-la
U-sab-sib	Nin
U-Mersi	Persephone
Tammuz	Istar

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Venus	Lagas
Bau	U-urugal
Mulu-hursang	Sirtumu
Anu	Ea
Beltis	Nirig
Nusku	Nebo
Ni-zu	Samas
Sahi	Ma-banba-anna
Aa	En-Mersi
Allatu	Amurru
Sin	Assur
Abil Addu	Aku
Apsu	Beltu
Dagan	Dumu-zi-abzu
Elali	Kuski-banda
Isum	Kaawanu
Mami	Nin-azu
Nin-man	Lugal-Amarada
Zaraqu	Qarradu
Suqamunu	Ura-gala
Zagaga	Ueras

You may think I spoof. That I invent the names. I do not. Ask the rector to lend you any good treatise on comparative religion: you will find them all listed. They were gods of the highest standing and dignity – gods of civilized peoples – worshipped and believed in by millions. All were theoretically omnipotent, omniscient, and immortal. And all are dead.

CHAPTER XIX
SUITE AMÉRICAINE

§ 1. *The Capital of a Great Republic*

THE fourth secretary of the Paraguayan Legation. . . . The chief clerk to the House committee on industrial arts and expositions. . . . The secretary to the secretary to the Secretary of Labour. . . . The brother to the former Congressman from the third Idaho district. . . . The messenger to the chief of the Senate folding-room. . . . The doorkeeper outside the committee-room of the House committee on the disposition of useless executive papers. . . . The chief correspondent of the Toombsboro, Ga., *Banner* in the Senate Press-gallery. . . . The stenographer to the assistant chief entomologist of the Bureau of Animal Industry. . . . The third assistant chief computer in the office of the Naval Almanac. . . . The assistant Attorney-General in charge of the investigation of postal frauds in the South Central States. . . . The former wife of the former secretary to the former member of the Interstate Commerce Commission. . . . The brother to the wife of the *chargé d'affaires* of Czechoslovakia. . . . The bootlegger to the ranking Democratic member of the committee on the election of President, Vice-President and Representatives in Congress. . . . The acting assistant doorkeeper of the House visitors' gallery. . . . The junior Senator from Delaware. . . . The assistant to the secretary to the chief clerk of the Division of Audits and Disbursements, Bureau of Stationery and Supplies, Post-office Department. . . . The Press-agent to the chaplain of the House. . . The commercial

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attaché to the American Legation at Quito. . . . The chauffeur to the fourth assistant Postmaster-General. . . . The acting substitute elevator-man in the Washington monument. . . . The brother to the wife of the brother-in-law of the Vice-President. . . . The aunt to the sister of the wife of the officer in charge of ceremonies, State Department. . . . The neighbour of the cousin of the stepfather of the sister-in-law of the President's pastor. . . . The superintendent of charwomen in Temporary Storehouse B7, Bureau of Navy Yards and Docks. . . . The assistant confidential clerk to the chief clerk to the acting chief examiner of the Patent Office. . . . The valet to the Chief Justice.

§ 2. *The Land of Opportunity*

Irish policemen at early mass, praying humbly to God that Jews will start illicit wine-shops on their posts, and so enable them to educate their eldest sons for holy orders. . . . Professors in one-building 'universities' on the prairie, still hoping, at the age of sixty, to get their whimsical essays into the *Atlantic Monthly*. . . . Tram guards on lonely suburban lines, trying desperately to save up \$500 and start Ford garages. . . . Rectors of one-horse little churches in decadent villages, who, whenever they drink two cups of coffee at dinner, dream all night that they have been elected bishops. . . . Cinema actors who hope against hope that the next adoring letter will be from a rich bootlegger's wife. . . . Jewish delicatessen dealers who spend their whole lives searching for a cheap substitute for the embalmed veal used in chicken-salad.

. . . Italians who wish that they were Irish. . . . Mulatto girls in Georgia and Alabama who send away greasy dollar bills for bottles of Mme. Celestine's Infallible Hair-Straightener. . . . Mothers who dream that the babies in their cradles will reach, in the mysterious after years, the highest posts in the Masonic fraternity. . . . Farmers who figure that, with good luck, they will be able to pay off their mortgages by 1943. . . . Contestants for the standing broad-jump championship of the Altoona, Pa., Y.M.C.A. . . . Pale chemists in remote towns of the Epworth League and flannel nightgown belts, endlessly wrapping up bottles of cough syrup. . . . Women hidden away in the damp kitchens of unpainted houses along the railway tracks, frying tough beefsteaks. . . . Watchmen at lonely railway crossings in Iowa, hoping that they'll be able to get off to hear the Primitive Baptist evangelist preach. . . . Ticket-takers in the New York underground, breathing sweat in its gaseous form. . . . Family doctors in poor neighbourhoods, faithfully relying upon the therapeutics taught in their Eclectic Medical College in 1884. . . . Farmers ploughing sterile fields behind sad, meditative horses, both suffering from the bites of insects. . . . Greeks tending all-night coffee-stands in the suburban wildernesses where the tram-cars stop. . . . Women confined for the ninth or tenth time, wondering helplessly what it is all about. . . . Wesleyan preachers retired after forty years of service in the trenches of God, upon pensions of \$600 a year. . . . Wives and daughters of Middle Western country bankers, marooned in Los Angeles, going tremblingly to swami séances in

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dark, smelly rooms. . . . Decayed and hopeless men writing leaders at midnight for leading papers in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama.

§ 3. *Eminence*

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